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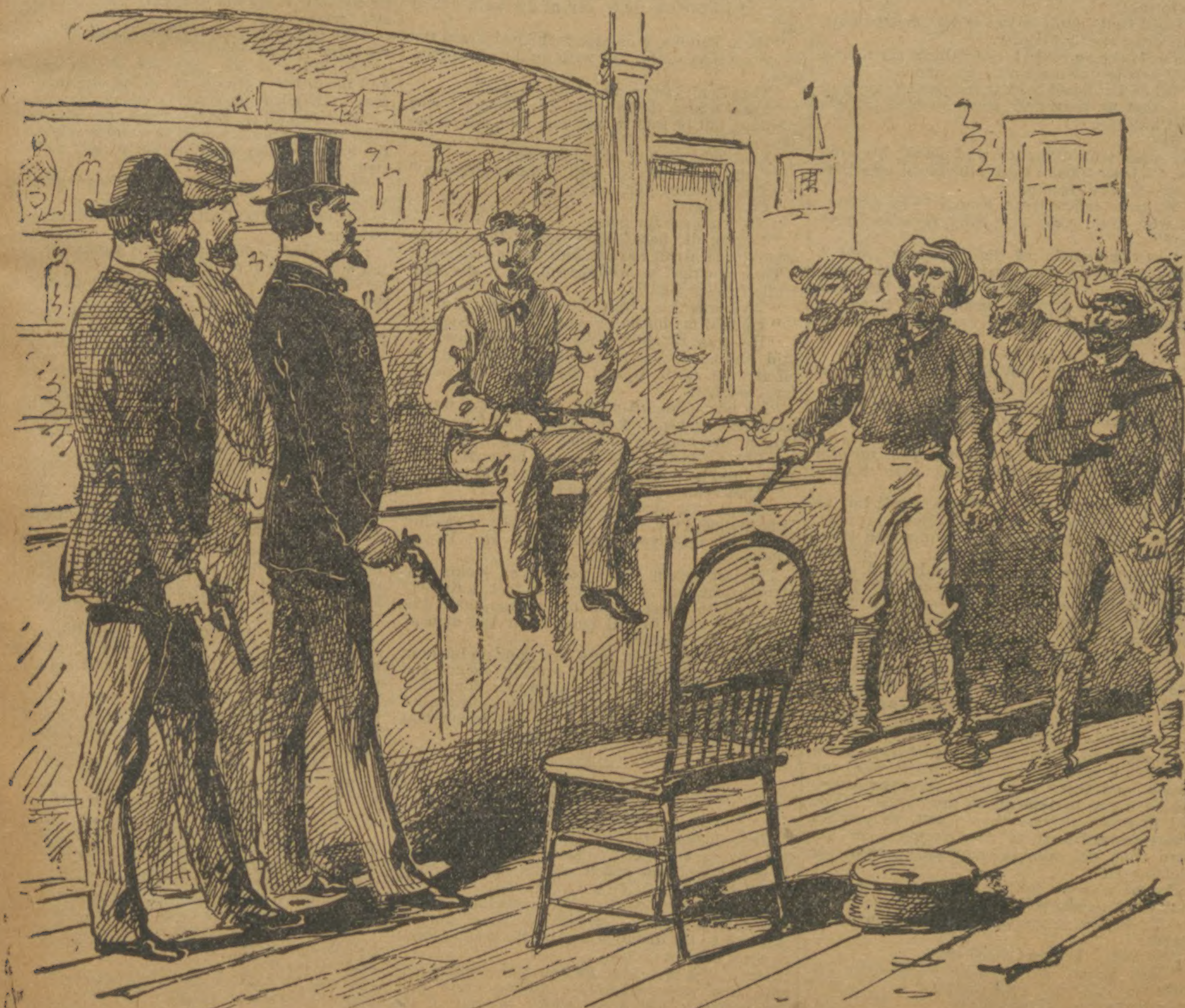
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THE KID GLOVE MINER; or, The Magic Doctor of Golden Gulch.

A ROMANCE OF THE GOLD MINES.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "WILD BILL, THE PISTOL DEAD SHOT,"
"WILD BILL'S GOLD TRAIL," ETC., ETC.



"NOW START THE MUSIC WHENEVER YOU ARE READY," CALLED OUT POWELL.

The Kid Glove Miner;

OR,

The Magic Doctor of Golden Gulch.*

A Romance of the Gold Mines.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

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CHAPTER I.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

A HORSEMAN was slowly wending his way along a border trail, that led through wild and picturesque mountain scenery in the far West.

He was well-mounted, well-armed, and was dressed in the suit of one who had lived in the city, rather than in that wild region of the frontier where a buckskin costume, the uniform of the soldier, or the rough attire of the miner were only seen.

Coming to where the trail branched off in two different directions, the horseman drew rein, and dismounting, threw himself down upon a mossy bank to rest, simply remarking:

"I'll rest here for a while, for, without my guide, I am at a loss which trail is the right one."

The speaker was a young man with a long, flowing beard, that completely hid his handsome face; his hair was black, and fell in clustering curls about his neck, and he had the air of one reared in refinement.

Upon his face was a look that was unfathomable, for at times he appeared worried, and again he would smile as though pleased with some thought that flashed through his mind.

At last he sprang to his feet, as he heard hoof-falls, and a moment after a second person appeared in sight, toiling slowly up the trail.

This second person was dressed as a miner, rode a mountain pony, was armed, and was also a young man.

But now his face was as white as that of a corpse, and he clung to the horn of his saddle to prevent falling to the ground, as he reeled from side to side.

"Good God! guide, what is the matter with you?" cried the first comer.

As he spoke he caught the falling form, and laid it gently down upon the ground.

"While I stopped back there, pard, to try and get a shot at that deer, some coward put his bullet into me."

"See!"

He spoke with difficulty, and placed his hand upon his breast, from which the blood was flowing in a steady stream.

"My poor fellow, that wound looks serious. But who could your cowardly assailant have been?"

"I saw the smoke of the shot, pard, and it came from up the trail, just the way you went, when you rode on. I tried to catch him, and managed to get into my saddle, and come on. But he was too fast for me, and I have got my death-wound."

"No, no—not as bad as that, I hope."

The wounded man looked the other fixedly in the eyes, and then said slowly:

"Pard, I saw the man who shot me, as he ran off, and, if I wrong you, God forgive me, but he looked just like you!"

"In Heaven's name! can you suspect me of a crime so foul?" and the young man turned deadly pale.

"It was a strange coincidence, pard; but he did look like you. I don't believe it now, though, and I'll prove it by handing you these papers, and this wallet of money. All my diggings are in there, pard, for Faro Fred changed my gold-dust into these bank-notes, for I was about starting home, when you asked for a guide up into the hills, and it being on my trail, I came with you, and here's the end of it."

"From my soul, I hope not!"

"I have seen too many men shot out in this wild land, pard, not to know that this wound here has called in my chips. Yes, it's fatal, and just as I was starting home, after three long years in the mines, to make money for those I love."

"Well, pard, whoever it was shot me, I know not; but I give to you my papers and my money, and there is twenty thousand there, and I ask you to take all to my mother. You will find her address there; and, as you act square toward a dying man's request, and toward that old woman, may God reward or punish you!"

The man spoke in low, earnest tones, evidently with great pain and difficulty, however, and the one he so solemnly addressed said fervently:

"So be it. I accept the trust."

"Now go on to the cabin of Elegant Ed. Take the left-hand trail, and it's a couple of miles further up the mountain."

"Ed's a half-way doctor, you know, and he might fetch me through. But I doubt it."

*Dr. Frank Powell, known as "White Beaver" and "Misty Medicine," and late surgeon U. S. Army.—THE AUTHOR.

"I will go at once, and return with him. Keep up a stout heart, and hope for the best."

The speaker threw himself upon his horse, took the right-hand trail, and disappeared.

But hardly had he been gone five minutes, when there appeared others upon the scene.

They were a band of miners evidently, from their dress and general appearance, and they wore the inseparable belt of arms, never to be left off in that wild region.

Mounted upon mountain ponies, they were coming along at a slow trot, when their eyes fell upon the form of the wounded man lying by the side of the trail.

"It's Lucky Pete!" cried one, as he threw himself from his horse, and knelt by the side of the one whom he had recognized, while his half-dozen companions followed his example.

"Waal, Lucky Pete, this hain't no luck you is in now," said one of the miners.

"No, boys, I'm no longer Lucky Pete, for I've got my death-wound, I feel," he answered in a low tone.

"Waal, it do so look; but how did it come about?" asked one of the party.

"I was with the gentleman who wanted to go to Elegant Ed's, and as it was on my way to the stage station, I offered to guide him."

"I halted to get a shot at a deer while he rode on, and soon after I got it here as you see, pard!"

"But who shot yer, Pete?"

The man was silent, and again the question was asked:

"Who drew on yer, Lucky Pete?"

"I could not swear, pard, who it was."

"Does yer think you knows?"

"Yes."

"Jest shout his name, Pete, and it'll be on a tombstone as soon as we kin lay our grip upon him."

"Yas, you has been ther friend o' every man in our camp, Pete, and we hain't goin' ter let no man call in yer checks, 'thout bein' in ther place yer goes ter, ready ter cash 'em."

"We was goin' up ter Elegant Ed's, ter see him about a leetle claim he hes said he wanted ter buy from us, an' we hoped ter git thar afore you left ter wish yer another good-by and best luck, and heur we finds yer about bein' called in."

"Well, Bender, it cannot be helped," said the wounded man sadly, but with an air of resignation.

"Thet don't tell us who drew on yer?"

"I saw a man that looked like the one I was guiding; but he said it was not him, and I believe it."

"Ahal whar is he?" asked Bender.

"Gone up to Ed's for help, to take me there."

"We kin carry yer, pard."

"Come, lads!"

"No, I am too far gone."

"Let me die here," said Lucky Pete, as the others were about to raise him in their arms.

They saw that he would soon die, so desisted, while Bender asked:

"Who was this dandy from the East, Pete?"

"He told me his name, but I do not recall it."

"He was Elegant Ed's brother-in-law, he said, and he also told me that his sister had run off and got married, and the family had never forgiven her."

"Ed was wild, he told me, and his sister would have him, and so they run away, and for a long time no one knew where they were."

"But at last a letter came home from his sister and he put out here to look them up."

"That is all I know about him."

"Waal, we shall make his more intimate 'quaintance, Pete, and ef he are guilty o' sendin' thet bullet inter your heart, then— Ha! Pard, he's gone!"

The last words were uttered at seeing the strong form quiver from head to foot, a torrent of blood to burst from his wound, and the handsome head to fall back from the arm of Bender, who held it.

"Yes, pard, poor Pete hev gone on his long trail," said Bender, sadly, and in silence the group stood gazing down upon him, for rough as all of them were, and bad as most of the lot were said to be, Lucky Pete the miner had always been a favorite with them.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS FATE.

UPON leaving the spot where he left Lucky Pete dying, the "Dandy from the East," as one of the miners had called the handsome young man, pressed rapidly on up the trail.

It was a rough road but he urged his horse on as fast as it was safe for him to travel, and at last saw in the distance, and off the trail, a small cabin with two rooms.

It set back under the shelter of the mountain-side, and was half-hidden among pines and cedars; but it had a cozy look, in spite of its surroundings.

It was stoutly built of logs, and had a roof in front that projected far over, thus forming a kind of piazza.

A door was at one end and a window at the

other, and the dwellers in the lonely house certainly had done all that was possible to render themselves comfortable.

Firewood was piled up in quantity near the cabin, a shanty in the rear served as a shelter for horses, and two really fine animals were then staked out on a small grass-plot not far distant, while their saddles, one for a man, the other for a lady, hung upon a tree near by.

Some clothing, evidently not long out of the wash-tub, hung upon a line between two trees, and besides this indication, together with the side-saddle, there was another evidence of a woman's presence in the cabin in a large, half-finished bed quilt, lying upon a rustic chair in front of the door.

A column of smoke curled lazily upward from the chimney, and the horseman, as he rode up, beheld a scene of home life that was most attractive, rude as it was.

Dismounting, he hitched his horse and approached on tip-toe.

Listening at the open window a minute, he then went to the door and laid his hand upon the latch, still keeping up the air of a man who wished to remain unseen by the inmates.

Cautiously he raised the latch and stepped within, as the door noiselessly opened.

For some minutes he remained within, and then a strange cry was heard and he came tottering out of the cabin, a knife in his hand, and upon it stains which only human blood can make.

Like one dazed he stood, gazing down at the ground, his form quivering and his lips set firmly, while his hand grasped the blood-stained knife.

Thus moments went by and he did not move. Sounds fell upon his ears, and he seemed not to hear them.

But at last he started, when in hoarse tones came the words:

"Pard, half a dozen dead shots covers you, so don't you commit suicide by moving."

He started, looked up quickly and beheld confronting him Bender and his miner comrades.

They each one held a revolver covering him, and they meant to use them, too, if he gave them a reason for so doing.

"Who are you?" he asked, seeming to shake off the almost stupor that had been upon him, and facing them.

"We is miners from Golden Gulch City, and we want you for murder."

"Ho, Elegant Ed! come out o' your cabin!" and the latter words were called out in a loud tone by Brick Bender who acted as spokesman.

"If you call to Edgar Elgin he will never hear you, for he lies dead in yonder cabin, and by his side, also slain, is his wife," said the stranger.

His words seemed to fill even those rude men with horror, and they dashed into the cabin, to return an instant after, bearing in their arms two forms.

"Yes, they is dead, and your hands holds the knife thet took thar life."

"You is wanted, pard, fer three murders yer hes committed this day."

"Ha! dare you accuse me of murder so foul?" cried the stranger, shaking off the spell upon him, and glaring upon his accusers.

"He's showing his claws, pards."

"Seize him," cried Bender.

Four men sprung upon the stranger, and in spite of a desperate resistance, he was securely bound; but not until after two more had come to the aid of the others.

"Waal, he are ther strongest I ever see," said one.

"He are iron from hoof ter head."

"Thar hain't one o' us thet hesn't got a keep-sake from him," responded a third, with a bleeding face, and he eyed the others, all of whom had indeed gotten a blow or two from the stranger in the fracas, and who had handled himself in a manner that showed wonderful activity, skill and giant strength.

Bound hand and foot he lay upon the ground before his captors, the same half-dazed look having come back to his face, and seemingly unconscious of his peril.

His eyes were bent upon the face of the dead woman, who lay near him, while the man, known as Elegant Ed, had been placed upon the other side of his wife.

The face of the former was lovely in the extreme, stamped with refinement, and youthful, for she could not have been more than twenty.

Her form, though clad in homespun, was slender, graceful in every curve, and her hands and feet were small and shapely.

The man, her husband, was tall, well-formed, and though a miner his dress was really elegant, for he wore the finest black broadcloth pants, a blue flannel shirt, with collar and cuffs embroidered in silk, a red silk scarf about his neck, and top boots.

It was his foppish dress that had gained for him the name of Elegant Ed; but, though a dandy in attire, it had been found out in the mines that he had all the pluck necessary to carry him through life, was a generous fellow, and his heart was in the right place.

He had boldly come to the mines with his

beautiful young wife, and he had bought a claim, with a few hundreds that he had and set to work.

The boys had helped him to build his cabin, and there was no man in the mines treated with more respect, than was Elegant Ed, or more envied, for his pretty wife, with a kind word for all, was looked upon as a superior being, and was spoken of as Ed's Angel, and was known by no other name.

Now, as she lay there before the band of miners, a knife wound in her side, which had let out her life, and her husband, with a bullet in his brain, lay near her, pity and a thirst for revenge was uppermost in every heart.

"Pard, you have did it this time, sure," said Bender, hoarsely.

"Yer didn't like ther young feller thet married yer sister, an' yer come here ter git even."

"Yer did git even, I'll sw'ar; an' more, yer thought yer'd like ter git a leetle change ter run on, so yer shot poor Lucky Pete, an' hes got his pile, fer here is ther papers and his bank-notes yer tuk from him."

"Thar is two shots gone out o' yer pistol. One kilt Lucky Pete, and t'other are in Ed's head thar, while yer knife are red with yer sister's blood."

"Waal, yer does look like ther leddy, thet are sart'in, an' I does wonder, when yer looked inter ther sweet face o' Ed's Angel, how yer c'u'd hev druv yer knife ter her heart."

"Liars! accursed fiends! to dare charge me with crime so vile! Were I free I would kill you!" said the prisoner, savagely, his face livid and his eyes glaring.

"Pard, it are a wonder how ye could kill 'em, but circumstances are ag'in' yer," replied Bender.

"I admit that appearances are against me, in their worst form, but I am innocent."

"No, I guesses you is guilty; and it remains fer me ter ax ther boys what they thinks, fer I are yer judge and they is ther jury."

"What says yer all, pards?"

"Are ther priz'ner guilty or innocent?"

"Guilty!"

The word was spoken by every man, and uttered in a tone that was in deadly earnest.

"Waal, pard, yer hears ther verdict, and I now hes ter pernounce yer sentence."

"I were onst found guilty myself, and sentenced ter be hung, when I were innocent in ther first degree."

"Afore hangin' day come round ther jail burnt up, an' I were enabled ter skip."

"Knowin' as I does thet I were not guilty, I does feel thet mistakes kin be made, so I does not sentence yer to hang."

"But, pard, I does come down on yer with a sentence thet will be a terror, and don't yer fer git it."

"Come, pards, bury poor Elegant Ed an' his Angel, and ter-night we'll camp right heur an' visit execution on this priz'ner; an' it are my Bible opinion he won't be heerd o' in these parts ag'in."

"What are yer goin' ter do with him, pard Bender?" asked several.

"Waal,"—and he called his comrades out of ear-shot of the prisoner:

"Yer see, he hev robbed Lucky Pete o' his dust."

"Yas!" said several, eagerly.

"It are a han'some pile, an' I moves thet we knows nothin' 'bout findin' Lucky Pete or thet stranger, but thet we finds Elegant Ed and his Angel murdered?"

"Yas."

"Ef we says nothin' about findin' Pete dead, an' nothin' 'bout ther stranger, in course we don't know nothin' 'bout Lucky Pete's money found on ther strange pard, nor what he may hev in his pockets."

"Does yer tumble ter my figgerin' fer yer good?"

"Yas."

"Now Lucky Pete kin be planted over ther hills whar nobody will find his grave, and—"

"Ther pilgrim thar?" asked one.

"Waal, when I hes executed my sentince on him, he'll give us no trouble."

"Now we'll tend ter buryin' Lucky Pete first, then ther stranger pard kin be tuk keer of, an' you, Shorty, kin light out fer ther camps and tell ther 'habitants thet Elegant Ed an' his Angel hev been murdered, and thet ther balance of us is heur waitin' ter see what is ter be did."

"Then, one month from ter-night, when things is kinder quieted down, you kin jist all of yer come ter my shanty, an' we'll hev a squar decide o' Lucky Pete's dust an' of what thet pilgrim hev got about him too."

"What shall we do with Lucky Pete's an' ther stranger pard's horses?" asked one.

"Thet are a nice question, Shorty, an' as yer axes it, yer hed better mount one, lead t'other, and light out ter ther stage station an' sell 'em, or trade 'em."

Thus the band of plotters arranged their plans, and Lucky Pete was buried far away in a secluded part of the mountain, while, as night came on, the fate of the stranger was decided upon.

But what that fate was the band were sworn to secrecy, as they were also, regarding the dis-

posal of the property which had belonged to Lucky Pete, and the man whose doom must remain for the present a mystery.

CHAPTER III.

BENDER'S PARDS.

THE murder of Elegant Ed and his wife, created the wildest excitement in and about Golden Gulch, and every miner who had a claim within half a score of miles of the spot, visited the lonely cabin, the scene of the tragedy.

There were a few who suspected Bender and his pards, for they bore not the best reputation in those parts; but then none of Elegant Ed's papers and gold seemed to have been touched, and there being no apparent motive for their committing the deed, inquiry was pushed in other quarters to find the murderers.

Bender and his pards told how they had come up the trail, to see Elegant Ed about a claim down the valley, which he wanted to purchase, and had happened upon a spot where there seemed to have been a death-struggle.

Then they had ridden on to the cabin to find Elegant Ed and his Angel dead.

More they could not tell, or would not, and kept a discreet silence regarding the fate of Lucky Pete, what they had done with the stranger, and about the ride Shorty had taken with the two horses.

But, though the most skillful trailers set to work to solve the mysterious murder, no trace could be found of who had done the deed.

Among the papers of Elegant Ed, one was found willing his claim to one, William Blackstone, who lived in Leavenworth, Kansas.

This document was also signed by the miner's wife, and these words ended it:

"Now, in case of my death, and the death of my wife, Lois, let the one into whose hands this paper falls, write to William Blackstone, Leavenworth, Kansas, to come here and take full control of all effects and property left by the undersigned."

Then followed the signature of the husband and wife.

To Dr. Frank Powell,* an ex-army surgeon, turned miner, the papers and effects were given by common consent, with the decision that he should write William Blackstone and make known the full particulars of what had happened to those who had made him their heir.

The doctor, having gotten into a groove of ill-luck, as often happens to a man, had become a miner at Golden Gulch; but he found, being the only man of medicine and surgery in those parts, that practicing his profession paid him better than gold-digging, so he took up his quarters at the "Gold Brick Hotel," and hung out his shingle as a giver of pills and setter of bones.

The doctor wrote the letter, read it to those most interested, and it was sent to its destination, while the terrible affair which rendered the mailing of it necessary, became more than a nine days' wonder at Golden Gulch.

In the mean time Bender and his pards continued on in the even tenor of their way.

They worked their claims when they wanted to, idled as it suited them, and were wont to spend their nights, or the greater part of them at Faro Fred's Temple, as the principal gambling-place of Golden Gulch was called.

The band known as Bender's Pards, numbered just seven men, at the time of which I write, and they were inseparable.

They had come together to the Gulch from another mining-camp, which they said did not pan out to suit them, and there they had been known as the Ten Pins, there being just that number of them, a circumstance which caused them to at once come in for border nomenclature.

But of the ten, three had departed this life, one dying a natural death, and the two others being cut off in their willfulness by a shot, for meddling in the affairs of others.

Those remaining, had by inheritance, continued to work the claims of their deceased pards, and their own too, and went supposed to be prospering, under the name given them in Golden Gulch, of the Seven Stars. Brick Bender, by general consent, was the ruling spirit, and he not only had the best claim, but also his shanty was far superior to any in the camp, which was situated a mile out of Golden Gulch.

The cabin was located at the head of a small ravine, and was in a lonely part of the mining-camp, and, upon nights when the weather was inclement his comrades were wont to come to visit him, and there drink and gamble away the hours.

There is no need of making known that the six pards of Bender all looked forward to making one visit to the wigwam of their chief, which they hoped would pan out well for them, and which would be upon the occasion of the night appointed for the division of the spoils taken from the stranger, whom they had accused of the three murders, and which included the wealth of unfortunate Lucky Pete.

Their secret of the death of the miner and the stranger had been kept most thoroughly, and

* Doctor Frank Powell is now one of the most prominent medical men in the far West.—THE AUTHOR.

knowing that Lucky Pete had accumulated a snug little fortune, the Seven Stars anticipated a few thousand for each one of them, more especially as a well-filled wallet had been taken from the pocket of the man whose fate they had solemnly sworn should remain a mystery.

The night before the one appointed for the division of the spoils, Bender had pleaded a slight illness, and declined to go up to Golden Gulch to try his luck at Faro Fred's.

But his comrades had gone, and, thinking of the morrow, had all played with a recklessness of consequences never exhibited by any of their number before.

But then they reasoned: "What mattered the loss of a few hundreds in a venture to win thousands, when they would receive a large stake on the following night?"

CHAPTER IV.

DIVIDING THE SPOILS.

THAT Boss Bender, as he was more frequently called by his immediate comrades, had falsely pleaded illness as an excuse for his not visiting Golden Gulch, was very evident, for he bore not the slightest trace of indisposition, as he cooked his supper that night, and a most substantial meal it was for a sick man.

After partaking of it with evident relish, he securely bolted and barred his door and window, shut out, with blankets hung here and there, every ray of light that might penetrate through a crack or crevice, and then taking from a secret receptacle a wooden box, placed it upon the table.

Boss Bender was an economical man, and seldom burned more than one tallow candle; but upon this occasion he extravagantly lighted four, placing them in a kind of semicircle upon the table, and seating himself on the side between the two ends, where the light fell full upon what he should place before him, he opened the small wooden box and laid its contents in front of him.

There was gold, then some bags of dust, a few old papers and a roll of bills, and these were laid one side, while a large morocco pocketbook, a wallet, some papers, a handsome watch and chain, with a ring and pair of sleeve buttons seemed to engross his attention.

"Them things being mine, I doesn't wish 'em to be mixed with what we got from Lucky Pete an' ther stranger."

"Now ter biz, fer I hes ter select out o' ther wallets jist ther sum I intends ter keep fer myself, an' when ther settlement is had to-morrow night, of course I gits my share out o' ther balance, an' ther boys won't be none o' ther wiser."

He opened the leather case of Lucky Pete as he spoke, and his eyes glittered with avaricious joy as he saw the large sum it contained.

"We know'd he'd struck it rich, but 'twarn't suspected he'd got it so big as this," he muttered while he selected just one-half of the sum and placed it among the personal effects he had put to one side.

"Now thar's enough ter be divided among us, I guesses, an' ther boys will be delighted, I knows, for they doesn't suspect half so much."

"Now ter ther stranger's pile an' see how it'll pan out."

The watch, chain and jewelry he laid ore side, well knowing that his comrades were aware that he had those; but the pocket-book he opened, and again smiled delightedly as he saw that it contained quite a snug sum.

Half of this he also laid aside for himself, and there sat gazing upon his riches, while he said:

"Waal, ef I can't make the yarth pan out rich, I sartinly is doin' well, an' I'll be able ter skip back afore long ter ther old home, and let 'em see what I made with ther sweat o' my brow."

"They ust ter say I w'u'd never do well, thet I were too durned rapid, an' I wasn't uncommon pop'ler about ther old home; but I guesses when I goes back rich all my leetle backslidin's will be overlooked, an' they'll want ter make me a deacon in ther church."

"Waal, waal, but I are in luck."

"I do not think so, pard!"

A cry of terror broke from the lips of Boss Bender as the words fell upon his ears, and shrinking away, he turned upon the speaker.

A tall form stood before him, attired in buckskin, wearing a hood sombrero and a mask, which effectually concealed his face, as did a pair of large gloves hide his hands, so that the miner knew not who it was that had so mysteriously entered his cabin, where he had believed himself wholly alone.

The stranger, whoever he was, was well armed, and a revolver in his right hand covered the miner.

"Who is yer?" gasped the miner, in a hoarse voice, while his face was livid, for his arms hung upon a peg near the door, and he was at the mercy of the man.

"I am one who has come for my share in the spoils you are dividing," was the quiet answer.

"Is you one of the boys who slipped into my cabin someway, and is playing a joke on me?"

"You'll find that I am playing no joke on you, Boss Bender, for I am in deadly earnest."

"I did slip into your shanty to-day when you were absent for a moment, and I was hiding beneath yonder curtain, so I have heard your plot to defraud your fellow-thieves of the plunder which you stole together."

"I ag'in axes who is yer?" whined the man so cleverly caught, hardly knowing what to say, and so wholly in the power of the intruder that he did not dare move, for fear his life would go with his ill-gotten booty.

"I am one who has come for my share of this plunder!" and the speaker pointed to the table.

"Your share?"

"Yes."

"Yer hain't got no share."

"I shall take all that I wish, at any rate, and if you move from where you stand I will kill you," was the stern reply.

"Durn yer, if I bed a weepin yer'd be cold meat mighty quick!"

"I don't mind your threats, Boss Bender; but you had better heed my warning, if you love life," and the intruder stepped to the table, glanced over the things that lay upon it, and making a calm selection of what he desired to take, very calmly thrust it into his pocket.

Then, with a yell like an enraged lion, Bender sprang upon him, seemingly determined to risk death to defend his stolen treasure.

But he was met by a blow that felled him his length upon the floor, where he lay completely stunned.

Taking a rope from a peg in the wall, the stranger quickly bound him securely, and leaving the remainder of the contents of the wooden box upon the table, and blowing out the tallow candles, he left the cabin and its occupant in darkness.

CHAPTER V.

AN INTERRUPTED EXECUTION.

THE usual frequenters of the gambling hell known as "The Temple," and kept by one Faro Fred, were considerably surprised at the heavy stakes which were risked by six of the Seven Stars who were playing there the night upon which the absent "Star" was plotting to defraud them, and had been so cleverly caught himself.

The fact is none of the Seven Stars, as I have said before Bender's gang was called, were heavy players, and to see them suddenly risk a hundred or two upon the turn of a card created general surprise.

In truth, they each one had a small "nest egg" laid away, and expecting that the division of the spoils upon the following night would more than treble any sum which they might have put aside, they were willing to risk that much upon trying to win more.

But luck, a most fickle companion at all times, went against every one of the six, and when midnight came there was just money enough left in the crowd to get a "night-cap" all round.

"Put up your money, boys, for you have all had fortune, which of course means good fortune to me, so I pay for the drinks and cigars."

"What will you have?"

The speaker was Fred Fairbanks, the owner of the Temple, and more frequently known as Faro Fred.

He was a man of striking appearance, with a marble-like complexion which the sun and winds had failed to brown, and an eye like an eagle.

His face was beardless, his teeth even and pearl-like, his smile very winning, and his features were cast in a perfect mold.

Clusters of brown curls fell upon his shoulders, and his attire was most striking, especially for that rude country, for he wore black broad-cloth pants, stuck in a very elegant pair of top-boots, and a brown velvet sack-coat, ornamented with solid gold buttons representing a miniature brick, and a snowy shirt, the bosom and cuffs of which were embroidered.

Diamond shirt-studs, ruby sleeve-buttons, and an immense solitaire upon his little finger, with a watch and chain of rare workmanship, completed his make-up.

He had come to Golden Gulch a year before, and opened his Temple of Chance, and he had thrived from the first, though no one had ever suspected him of playing an unfair game, or if they had, had wisely refrained from telling him so, for he had shown himself a man to stand no trifling, and the worst desperado in the Gulch knew that he had to behave himself in Faro Fred's quarters, or have to deal with one in every way capable of looking after his own interests, for he had amply proven that fact on numerous occasions.

A big heart in him too had Faro Fred, for he was ever ready to give a poor man a lift, took the part of the defenseless, and on one occasion, when a young man, a frequenter of his Temple, lost his last dollar one night, and frenzied by it, rushed upon him to kill him, the gambler had coolly shot him through the head, and learning that he was the only support of a widowed mother, he wrote to her telling her that her son

had been killed, and sent her every cent that the unfortunate fellow had gambled away in the Temple.

Then, too, Faro Fred had gotten up a grand funeral for the young man at his own expense, and went himself as chief mourner, and winning the higher regard of the miners by the very elegant manner in which he caused the affair to pass off.

"The Temple" belonging to Faro Fred was anything but an imposing affair, for it was but one story, built of logs and rough boards, and, without, looked like a barn; but within it was different, for the saloon was certainly most inviting to those who frequented the place, and there were few citizens of Golden Gulch who did not.

A bar, the "finest on the border," the Golden Gulchians boasted, was filled with decanters and glasses, backed by long mirrors, and was constantly thronged by thirsty crowds, while about the room were placed tables for card-players, a faro-bank, roulette game, and in one end a shooting-gallery, where, marked in large letters, Faro Fred's score with the revolver stood unequalled.

A room at the other end of the saloon was Faro Fred's sanctum by day, and at night the two bar-keepers, christened by the patrons as the "Gin-slingers," and "Benzine-mixers," occupied it as their sleeping quarters, for the gambler boarded at the Gold Brick Hotel, where he had the best room in the house.

Having now introduced to the reader Faro Fred, the Gambler of Golden Gulch, I need hardly say that his invitation to the six men of the Bender Band was most promptly accepted.

"Where is the boss to-night?" asked Faro Fred of Shorty, as they dashed off their drinks, and the gambler said to the bar-keeper:

"Fill 'em up again, Dug."

"He are sick ter-night, so cudn't come up to ther Gulch," answered Shorty.

"Tell him I want to see him, for I bought a horse to-day I am sure was the animal Lucky Pete rode away from the Gulch, and as he bought him from Bender, he would know him well, and I'd like to know."

"Yes, boss w'd know," said Shorty, with a slight choking in his throat, when he remembered that he had sold the very horse referred to.

"I almost fear, knowing Lucky Pete's affection for the horse, and that he told me he intended riding him all the way home, that some harm has befallen the young miner, as he carried with him something over twenty thousand dollars in bank notes, which I gave him for his gold dust."

The six men all started at this, but not so much from the fear that Lucky Pete had been foully dealt with, as the fact that they got an idea as to the amount in the wallet which their leader had in his possession, and the contents of which were to be divided upon the following night.

"You don't think nobody hes got away with him, does yer, pard?" asked Pegleg, one of the gang, whom a slight limp in one leg had gained him his nick-name, which alone he was known by.

"I hope not; but if the horse I bought proves to be the one that belonged to Pete, I shall trace the affair up, as I liked the miner, and would show no mercy to anybody who had murdered and robbed him."

"Yer'd do right, pard, and I'd help yer," said Shorty.

"Yes, yer c'u'd count on all o' us," and Shorty led off in swallowing the contents of the glass before him, as the conversation was taking a turn he did not like.

A moment after, lighting their cigars, they started for their camp, and it was decided to go by the cabin of Bender and tell him what Faro Fred had said about the horse.

They reached the cabin and knocked, when a voice within cried:

"Come in!"

The door was not bolted, the stranger having left it ajar, and quickly entering they found all dark, while Bender called out:

"Is that you, pards?"

"Yas, ther hull gang; but whar is yer?" assured Shorty.

"Bound hand and foot like a dog. "Quick! strike a light, pards, and help me, fer thar hes been bad work ter pay heur."

A candle was soon lighted, and they saw Bender lying upon the floor, and certainly most securely bound, while upon the table was the treasure he had taken from the wooden box, and which counted up his accumulations of riches for the past few years.

"Lordy! pard what hev tuk place?" asked Pegleg.

In a few words, as soon as he was released, Bender told his story of the visit of the masked stranger. But he saw that he was not believed by one of them.

"Boss, thar be heur a few leetle nicknacks o' yer own, thet yer hes laid violent hand on at some time, and a few hundreds, mayhap a thousand, in money; but ther wallet o' Lucky Pete containin' over twenty thousand dollars, as we knows, is gone, along with ther pocket-

book an' jewelry o' ther stranger we got away with, an' they was worth considerable."

"Now yer tells us thet them things was stole, while your things was left, and this talk won't go down."

Shorty's opinion seemed to be unanimous, and Bender asked:

"Does yer think I lies?"

"We does."

"Wasn't I tied when yer found me?"

"Yas, but not so all-fired tight, but thet yer might hev tied yerself!"

"Then yer accuses me o' stealin' ther money?"

"We does."

"Yer is durned liars, fer I is as innercint as a child."

"It depends upon ther child's age, its raisin' an' et ceterars, you is plcin' yerself ag'in' in innercence, as to how innercint yer is, Boss."

"But we believes yer hev got away with the money, an' then played this leetle game enter us."

"But it don't go."

"Waal, I kin do nothin' more but tell yer thet I was robbed as I hev said," said Bender in a disconsolate tone.

"It hain't squar', Boss, an' ef ther boys says hang yer up an' make yer shout whar yer hev hid ther dust, I says agreed."

The men looked at each other a moment in silence, and then one of them remarked:

"Shorty are right, pards, for I guesses we kin make him squeal as to what he hev done with ther money."

"Up with him then until he confesses," cried another, and in an instant the gang threw themselves upon the man, and a noose having been made with the rope with which he had been bound, it was thrown about his neck, and he stood before them tremblingly awaiting his fate, and wholly at their mercy.

"Now shout out ther truth, or up yer goes!" cried Shorty, taking the lead in the matter. The rope end was thrown over a beam in the cabin, and five of the gang seized hold of it.

"For God's sake, pards, don't hang me, fer I swars I are innercint," cried the man.

"Yer lies!"

"Yer hes stole our money, an' ef yer don't give it up yer hangs," shouted Shorty.

"Pards, I hain't got it, for I were robbed. Fer God's sake don't hang me!" pleaded the wretch.

"Up with him, pards, says I!" yelled Shorty, and up into the air the miserable being was dragged, until his head nearly touched the beam over which the rope was thrown.

"And down with him, pards, say I!"

At the words, a tall form stepped into the half-open cabin door, and in each hand was a revolver, one covering the group who held the rope-end, and the other pointed full at Shorty, who threw up his hands in short order, while his comrades involuntarily let go their hold, and Bender fell with a heavy thud upon the dirt floor.

CHAPTER VI.

A MASKED STRANGER BEFRIENDS A POOR.

WHEN Shorty saw that Boss Bender was getting into trouble, the idea seized upon him that he could step into the shoes of his leader should that personage have to step down and out.

Consequently, he had taken an important part in pushing Bender to the wall, though naturally he believed, with the others, that he had stolen the money and made up the story of the masked stranger.

It had not been the intention of the "six Stars" to hang the "seventh," as long as there was a possibility of forcing from him the truth.

But did he persistently refuse to tell where was the money, when each time let down for that purpose, then they might, in the intensity of their outraged feelings, let him hang just a moment too long, and thus rid the country of his presence.

The sudden entrance of the tall stranger created a turn in Bender's favor that was thrillingly dramatic.

In the first place he held the ascendancy through having given the party a complete surprise.

Then he covered Shorty with one revolver, and his eye seemed upon him, while a second revolver, cocked as was the other one, was pointed directly at the five rascals who had so quickly let go the rope-end, and given thereby Boss Bender a drop to earth.

As Pegleg said afterward:

"I seen his eyes thro' ther mask-holes, an' he were lookin' squar' at me, an' ther revolver were coverin' me too, tho' Shorty an' ther rest o' yer gerloots do say he looked an' p'inted at you. Waal, his eyes do seem cut on ther bias."

At any rate, the stranger held the entire gang at bay.

They saw a tall, broad-shouldered man, clad in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt, and with a belt about his waist containing a knife and two holsters, from which the revolvers that covered them had just been taken.

A broad-brimmed sombrero sheltered his head, and a mask completely hid his face, while his hands were incased in gauntlet gloves.

"What does yer want hear?" groaned Shorty, with an attempt to put on a courageous air.

"Justice."

"Waal, yer'll git justice ef yer don't dig out durn quick," responded Shorty.

"You'll get a bullet through your brain if you do not keep your tongue between your teeth, my man," was the stern reply of the masked stranger, who then continued:

"I say I came here for justice, and I will explain by saying that I came to do an act of justice, for you were hanging a man who told you the truth, when he said he was robbed by a stranger."

"Does yer mean it, pard?" asked Pegleg.

"I do mean it, for I found him here counting his treasure, and preparing it to divide among you as he thought best."

"That are so, pard, and I blesses yer fer them words," whined Bender, who had risen to a sitting posture, and, with his hands tied behind him, and the rope about his neck, was looking on with pallid, eager face.

Unheeding the words of the man he had befriended, the stranger continued:

"From the treasure before him, I selected just what suited me, and I have it with me now, should any of you, or all of you, seek to take it from me."

The stranger paused, but there was something so recklessly defiant in his challenge to them, that they dared not venture to carry out his suggestion, and vented their feelings only by low muttered oaths.

"Knowing that man to be innocent, you have no right to harm him, and should you do so, you may expect to hear from me again in a way which you will not like."

"In fact, you red-handed devils, each and every one of your band, known as The Seven Stars, from your captain there down to that wretch, Shorty, shall hear of me again, and woe be unto you when you cross my trail."

The deep voice and stern words of threatening caused those whom he addressed to shiver, and they glanced at each other in dread, while Shorty whined:

"How hes we harmed you, pard?"

"That each one of you shall know before I strike."

"Lordy! I thinks it are you thet is harmin' us, fer yer scoops in our dust, covers us with yer weepins, an' says yer intends ter call in our chips when yer strikes our trail ag'in, so that we hes ter live in awful suspense," said Pegleg.

"If you prefer to end the suspense, I am willing to meet each of you, one at a time, this night."

"I will first disarm you all, and then meet one of you at a time, with revolver or knife, just as you please, and right here in this cabin."

"What do you say?"

"Thet it hain't squar' fer seven men ter fight one," said Boss Bender, and this remark at once gained for him the ascendancy once more as leader, as the others knew not what to say and were completely cowed by the daring stranger, who had so boldly risked his life to befriend an avowed foe in a time of sore need.

"Yes, that are so."

"We hain't no cowards ter take advantage of yer, pard," said Pegleg.

"As you please; another time will suit me even better than now."

"Good-night, but don't forget that we will meet again."

He backed to the door as he uttered the last words, and sprung backward out into the darkness, just as half-a-dozen revolvers flashed together, and as many bullets were buried in the stout door-posts.

But no fall, no cry proved that the stranger had been hit, and in a mass, now no longer under the spell of his presence, the seven men rushed out of the door, for Boss Bender led them, his hands still tied behind his back, and the rope trailing after him.

Away in the darkness a horseman was seen riding swiftly away, and the Seven Stars knew that they had been cleverly worsted by one man, and with no hope of revenge that they could then see.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATAL LETTER.

In a small cabin on the outskirts of the then scattering village of Leavenworth, a man lay upon a rude cot.

He was a man of fine presence, though now his face was pale and emaciated, and he wore a look of suffering.

The cabin was but scantily furnished, and it was evident that its occupant was not blessed with too much of this world's goods so that he could be comfortable in his suffering.

His appearance indicated that he was one who had seen better days, for an air of refinement was upon his face which hardships had not obliterated.

Presently the door opened and a man entered the room, who, in face and form was strangely like the one upon the cot, excepting that he appeared in perfect health.

He was dressed in frontier garb, of hunting-shirt, dark pants stuck in top-boots, a gray

sombrero, and about his waist was a belt of arms.

That the two were connected by kindred ties was very evident, or their resemblance was a remarkable freak of nature.

"Well, Henry, I am glad that you are back, for I get very blue when left to myself," said the wounded man, for he was suffering from a bullet wound in his body.

"You must not get blue, for I had a talk with the surgeon, and he says that you are in a fair way to recover," answered the other.

"Yes, I feel that I am improving, but the call was a close one."

"What have you there, Henry?"

"A letter for you."

"Ah! a letter?"

"Then it must be from dear Helen."

"Oh! Henry, if you knew her it would be to love her, and just to think that when we became engaged, I should lose my all, and have to come here to seek a fortune."

"She told me she would marry me if I was poor, and come here with me to struggle with life; but I said no, I should first win riches, and then she should become my wife."

"You are talking too much, William," said the other, quietly.

"I know it, Henry; but when I think of Helen I cannot refrain from talking."

"Were she here now she would be a most kind and gentle nurse to me—nay, do not think that I feel that you are not, for you have devoted yourself to me wholly, and—"

"And I should do so, William, for you received the wound intended for my heart, and, though you did not know then that we were cousins, boldly came to my aid when that gang of roughs sought to kill me."

"It was a lucky meeting, Henry, if I did get so severe a wound, for I had often longed to see you again."

"Only think, we had not met since we were boys together, and uncle—"

The wounded man paused, while the other said, bitterly:

"Do not hesitate, William, to say what was upon your tongue. You meant that we had not met since we were boys, when uncle Henry, for whom I was named, drove me from his home and guardianship, for a wild, boyish freak of mine, and made you his heir."

"Life went rough with me for a while, William, and went well with you."

"But I got money after a while, and you lost your inheritance from being fool enough to in-dorse for supposed friends, and now we are on equal footing, for I gambled away all I had saved up."

"But come, shall I read you the letter, for it is not addressed in a lady's hand?"

"Then it cannot be from Helen," said the wounded man in a tone of disappointment.

"No, it comes from the West, somewhere, for it has the Overland stage stamp upon it."

"Read it, please," wearily said the sufferer.

Breaking the seal, Henry Blackstone read aloud, as follows:

"GOLDEN GULCH, May, 15th, 18—"

"To Mr. William Blackstone:—"

"Sir:—The cause of a stranger addressing you is on account of a property recently left to you by a miner living near this camp, and who recently lost his life in a most mysterious way."

"Why, Henry, can that letter be for me?" asked William Blackstone, with surprise.

"It certainly is addressed to you, and by reading on you will soon know," and Henry Blackstone resumed:

"I refer to a man who is known here in Golden Gulch as Elegant Ed, but whose real name I find, in looking over his papers, was Edgar Elgin—"

"Great God! poor Ed Elgin gone!" cried William Blackstone.

"So it seems, Will, but you must keep calm, or I will not read the letter to you."

"I am calm, Henry, so please read it."

Again Henry Blackstone resumed the reading:

"All that is known here of Mr. Elgin is that he came here some two years ago as a miner, and was accompanied by his wife, a lovely woman, who at once won the name of Ed's Angel."

"Elgin bought a lead up in the mountains and built a cabin there, and then set to work."

"He worked hard, and the mine panned out well, it seems, for he left dust and bank-notes worth some fifty thousand dollars, all of which was put in the safe of the Gold Brick Hotel, subject to your order, for to you he left his effects."

"To me?" gasped William Blackstone.

"Yes; so it seems."

"Poor fellow—to remember me for the like kindness done him in the past?"

"You were kind to him, then, Will?" asked Henry Blackstone, as though curious to know the story.

"Yes; for Ed Elgin and myself were college chums."

"He was a trifle wild, but fell in love with a beautiful girl, an heiress, and she returned that love."

"Ed reformed, but her kindred and friends opposed him, and they ran off together—for I loaned him a few thousand to start him on the road to fortune."

"He went West and bought that mine, it seems, for I did not write him after I lost my fortune; and yet he kept track of me, and has left me his wealth in return for a past kindness."

"Poor, dear Ed!"

"But read on, Henry, that I may know more of his sad fate."

Once more Henry Blackstone resumed the letter.

"It appears, sir, that some assassin went to Elgin's home, and killed both him and his wife, for he was found dead in his cabin with a bullet in his brain, while his poor wife lay by his side, slain by a knife-thrust in her heart."

"Those who found them were a band of men known by various names, such as Bender's Roughs, The Seven Stars, etc., and they are hard citizens; but, as not a thing was stolen from the cabin, and Ed was always liked by the crowd, no suspicion could be placed upon them."

"Every effort was made to find the murderer or murderers, but without result; and the miners placed in my hands the Elgin effects, with a request to write to you—for a paper was found, signed by both Edgar Elgin and his wife, leaving to you, in case of the death of both of them, all that they owned."

"A photograph of you was also found among his papers, and it, with all he left, I have in my keeping, subject to delivery to you personally, only."

"I need hardly say that poor Ed and his 'Angel' received decent burial at the hands of those by whom they were held in such high esteem."

"I have, sir, the honor to be your obedient servant, FRANK POWELL, M. D."

"An early response will oblige."

"Well, Henry, this is sad news," was the sorrowful remark of William Blackstone upon hearing the letter completed.

"Rather, you mean, good news."

"What! to hear the sad end of Ed Elgin and his beautiful wife?"

"It places you above want!"

"Bah! what weight is that in the balance against his fearful death?"

"I am surprised, Henry, that you should speak so, for I am not one to wish to rise to a life of comfort by the suffering and death of others."

"It's a clean fifty thousand in your pocket."

"It may be, and given me in return for a paltry few thousands I let him have in the past."

"His own kindred are very distant, and he cared not for them, and his wife's relatives are rich—so he left to me his all."

"So be it."

"I shall spend some of it in carrying the bodies back to civilization, and giving them Christian burial and a deserving monument."

"Then, Henry, I will let you have a few thousand to start you in life, and—"

"No, William Blackstone, I will have all!"

The words broke savagely from the lips of Henry Blackstone, and with a spring he was at the bedside.

Then his strong arms grasped the weak form of his cousin, who gazed up into his face with no atom of fear, while he said:

"Good God! have you gone gold mad, Henry Blackstone?"

"Yes, for I see in my grasp a fortune, and you, a wounded, almost dying man, the only obstacle between!" hissed the man.

"You would kill me, then, for gold?"

"Ay, would I—and will I! Hal! you would struggle, would you? You, worn by fever and suffering, would cope with my man strength! Ha, ha, hal! that is what I expected—what I hoped for! Now, William Blackstone, you are dying," and the murderer started back, as the struggle to rise and cast off the grip upon him caused a torrent of blood to burst from between the lips of the wounded man, who, weak and utterly powerless, sunk back upon his pillow.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAGIC DOCTOR.

DOCTOR FRANK POWELL was the "big bug" of Gold Gulch City.

Expecting to make a fortune with his pick and shovel, he had found his box of surgical instruments paid him better, for it was a more frequent occurrence for him to have to dig lead out of a wound than gold out of a mine, and the laser metal paid the best, he found, in the long run, for it brought the gold-dust to his pockets.

A man of attractive address, refinement, education, and handsome as an Apollo, he could not but win the esteem of the better classes, while he had the nerve and daring to force respect from the rougher element in Golden City.

Shortly after his arrival there, when he was known only as a miner, he had taken the part of a poor fellow against several desperadoes, which ended in his killing one, putting another to flight, and so severely wounding the third that his life was despaired of.

But the doctor ordered the wounded man to be taken to a room in the hotel, telling the landlord that he would pay the costs, and getting out his surgical instruments, went to work upon him.

He soon extracted the bullet, with the quiet remark:

"I aimed an inch higher up, and had I hit you there, my friend, you would have been boxed up by this time; but as it is I will bring you round all right."

And bring him round all right the doctor did, paying all expenses until the man's recovery, when he gave him a bank-note and with it a piece of advice, the latter being:

"New, seek new fields to be useful in, my friend, for if you remain here I shall have to bury you."

The desperado took the gratuitous advice and decamped, while the fame of Frank Powell spread through the camps, until all afflicted with ailments and wounds sought his skillful care.

Now and then he would have to pick half a dozen bullets out of a man, and again have to stitch up a knife-thrust, or give medicine for fever, and always with such success that he won a new name, according the style of the far West.

That name was the Magic Doctor, and once this was fixed upon him few in Golden Gulch knew him as Frank Powell.

Thus it was, when Elegant Ed and his Angel were slain, the Magic Doctor was selected by the self-appointed managers of the funeral and effects, as the appropriate personage to communicate with William Blackstone of Leavenworth, Kansas, and the heir of the Elgins.

That he did so, writing a full statement of facts, the reader is aware.

But the days glided into weeks, after the letter was sent, and no reply coming, Doctor Powell began to fear that the heir had not received his letter, and was about to write a second time, when one day, as he sat in his rooms, burnishing up his revolvers and knife, which he always kept in as perfect condition as he did his surgical implements, the Chinese bell-boy of the Gold Brick Hotel came softly through the door without knocking.

Instantly dropping the unloaded revolver which he was cleaning, Doctor Powell seized a loaded one that lay upon the table beneath his hand, and the Chinese was covered in the twinkling of an eye.

"Don't shootee! don't shootee! Me once Plug Chew," shouted the Heathen Chinese in startled tones.

"So I see now, my festive Plug Chew; but I will yet have to kill you, if you insist upon coming into my room without knocking, for, in this benighted land, a man must never be taken by surprise," coolly remarked the doctor, throwing back his long black hair, which fell in waving masses below his broad shoulders.

"Allee lightee, Magee Loctee; but Plug Chew forgettee."

"Yes, and I'll forget that it is you, sometime, my heathen friend."

"Plug Chew noote do no moree."

"See that you are not lying by your practice."

"Now what do you want?"

"Habee lettee for Magee Loctee."

"Oh! you have!"

"Well it is not often that I get a letter nowadays, so let me have it."

"From girlee," grinned the Chinese.

"How do you know that?"

"Habee heap sensee. Plug Chew no dam foollee."

"Ah! I am glad you told me, for I should have always suspected that you were; but you are way off the trail this time, Chinese, for this letter is addressed in a large, bold hand."

"Girlee habee largee hand, makee writee large."

"Get out!"

"Dinneer readee soon."

"I'll be there on time, Plug Chew," and the doctor broke the seal, while the Chinese still lingering, he dropped his hand upon his revolver, and Plug Chew bolted out of the door with an alacrity which would have caused a bullet to hasten to overtake him.

"It is from Leavenworth, yes, and from William Blackstone," said Frank Powell, as he glanced at the signature of the letter.

Then, half aloud he read:

"LEAVENWORTH, June 7th 18—.

"Frank Powell, M. D.:—

"DEAR SIR:—Your letter has been received, conveying to me the sad tidings of the death of my dear friends Edgar Elgin, and his beautiful wife, Lois.

"Words cannot tell you how I grieve for them, and bemoan that their end should have been so filled with horror.

"I am just recovering from a wound, received in a difficulty here some months ago, but shall be able to quickly follow my letter to Golden Gulch, when I shall seek you out.

"It was noble of Edgar Elgin to remember me as his heir, but then I suppose that he had not forgotten that when I was in better luck than now, I aided him to the full extent of my purse.

"Thanking you for your kindness in the matter, and promising soon to see you, I remain with respect,

Sincerely yours,

"WILLIAM BLACKSTONE."

"Well, I am glad to hear from him, and will now be relieved from the care of poor Elgin's fortune.

"Ha! you here again?" and the doctor bounded toward the door, as Plug Chew darted into the room once more, and again without knocking.

With a yell of terror the Chinese flew out, crying at the top of his voice:

"Dinee gettee coldee, doctee!"

Laughing at the wild Chinese, Frank Powell descended to the dining-room of the Gold Brick, where he knew mine host always had a good dinner awaiting his guests.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO OF A KIND.

"You hain't hed no letter yit, from ther gerloot yer writ ter about Elegant Ed's dust, hev yer?"

The question was put by Boss Bender to Doctor Frank Powell, some days after the reception of the letter from William Blackstone.

The doctor sat upon the piazza of the Gold Brick, smoking an after-dinner cigar, and chatting with Faro Fred, who, to make use of a paradox, made a breakfast of his dinner, for he always slept until noon.

The doctor never gambled, and yet he was always on good terms with Faro Fred, who also liked the man of medicine immensely, and the two were often together.

Boss Bender had approached the hotel, accompanied by Shorty and Pegleg, and, having been found not to be the thief the gang had believed him to be, and suffered innocently, they all sought to make amends by reinstating him as their leader, a circumstance which he took advantage of to become something of a martinet in retaliation.

"Yes, I have had an answer," returned Frank Powell, quickly.

"Waal, what does ther writin' say?"

"You can read the letter if you wish," said Powell, well knowing that Boss Bender could not write his own name.

"No, I doesn't keer ter do so! but I wants ter know what ther gerloot says?"

"He says that he will be here in a few days, and that the mystery regarding the death of Elegant Ed and his Angel he intends to clear up, for he seems to feel that those who found the bodies, must know something of how they died."

"Does they suspect thet we w'u'd do sich a thing?" asked Boss Bender, bristling up.

"Not knowing you, he may not suspect you; but when I give him a square look into the face of the men who found the Elgins dead in their cabin, he will doubtless feel that you are guilty," was the cool reply of the doctor.

"It are a durned lie, fer not a ounce o' Ed's dust were touched."

"No one knows just how much he left, Bender, as the paper does not state, and was dated some time before his death."

"He then had about fifty thousand dollars, and he must have dug out more dust after his wife and himself signed that will, or paper which they meant as such."

"And does yer dare ter hint thet I and my men w'u'd touch a pound o' dust as didn't belong ter us?"

"I don't hint, Bender, but I do say frankly, if you and your gang are honest, then nature has belied you in the make-up of your faces."

The response came coolly, and Faro Fred laughed, which but added fuel to the fire already kindled, for Bender shouted out:

"Ef yer says thet, pard doctor, yer hes ter fight."

"Who shall I fight, Bender?"

With the words the doctor covered the desperado with his revolver, by such a rapid movement, that the ruffian had not had time to draw, before he saw he was caught.

"Don't you boys get uneasy or you'll not succeed in life."

This remark was addressed to Shorty and Pegleg by Faro Fred, who covered each one of them with a weapon, as he saw that they intended to "chip in" to support their leader.

"Say, Faro Fred, we hain't got no quarrel with you," said Shorty.

"But you will have if you don't take your hands off those weapons."

"What in thunder are all this about, anyhow?" asked Bender, smiling to get out of an awkward situation.

"Oh! I thought you knew; but if you do not, it is as well to tell you that it is only a little pleasantry upon my part."

"Come, Bender, I know you to be a grand scamp, and I think your pards are birds of a feather, so I warn you to keep out of my way."

"If some fellow puts a bullet into you, or knifes you, and you still live, send for me and I'll pull you through if you can be saved; but don't crowd me, for I won't stand it."

"Now go into the bar and tell Jacques to make you drinks at my expense."

Frank Powell spoke in his easy, pleasant way, at the same time returning his pistol to the belt under his corduroy jacket, and willing enough to escape from having to face two such men as the Magic Doctor and Faro Fred were known to be. Bender and his pards withdrew, the former remarking:

"Waal, Doc, you is a queer one, fer I'm durned ef I understand yer."

"I feel flattered thusly," said the doctor with a winning smile, and into the bar went the trio, and reported to Jacques what Frank Powell had said.

"I'll jest ask him, pards, fer I don't keer ter put up ther quantity o' juice 'twill take ter

make you gerloots drunk, 'thout personal orders, said the wary bar-keeper, and approaching the window, he called out:

"Doctor, did yer say these gerloots were ter tighten up on your expense?"

"Yes, Jacques, give them anything they wish to call for, and maybe they'll get themselves killed before night," was the answer of Frank Powell, while, with a light laugh, Faro Fred remarked:

"I'd treat the balance of Bender's gang on the same fond hope, Powell; but here comes the stage, and that looks like a dandy on the box with Monk Harris."

"Yes, and he has the ribbons, too, and handles them well, that is certain."

"I wonder if he can be my expected friend, Blackstone?" answered the doctor, as the stage, with its six horses, drew nearer, coming on at a rattling pace.

CHAPTER X.

THE ELGINS' HEIR.

THE stage rolled up to the door of the Gold Brick as though it had no intention of coming to a halt, and those who came forward at a run to greet its arrival, for its coming was an important break in life at Golden Gulch, saw Monk Harris sitting on his box, his arms folded across his broad breast and a cigar between his lips, while another personage held the reins.

That other was a man of large size, with great broad shoulders, and a head that sat well upon them.

He was dressed in a suit of corduroy, wore a soft slouch hat, top boots, and the inseparable belt of arms was visible beneath his sack coat.

His hair was worn long, was black as night, and a full beard reached almost to his belt, giving him a striking and *distingue* air.

His eyes were intensely black, large and restless, and altogether he was a man to attract observation in any assembly.

At the proper moment he put his foot on the brake, drew in the team, and came to a halt in a style that showed he had calculated well, and knew his own skill and strength.

"Come, driver, let us have something," he said quietly, addressing Monk Harris, and springing from the box to the hotel piazza with the grace and ease of a circus leaper.

"I'll do it, pard, for I admires yer style in handlin' ther ribbons, an' I likes yer; but ef yer'll excoose me, I'll shinin' down by ther wheel an not take ther spring, for fear it might end in a flip flap for yours truly, Monk Harris," and the driver scrambled down from the box, while the stable boys led the horses away, there being no other passengers than the stranger.

Seeing Monk speak to Frank Powell and Faro Fred, the stranger said:

"Bring your friends and introduce me, driver."

"My name is William Blackstone, called Bill Black by my pards."

"Indeed, sir. I am glad to meet you, Mr. Blackstone."

"I am Frank Powell, with whom you have been in correspondence," said the doctor, stepping forward, rather prepossessed with the heir of Elegant Ed and his Angel.

"And I to meet you, Dr. Powell, for I came here to seek you."

"Join me, please, in a glass of something to wash the dust of the road out of my throat, and ask your friend, too."

Thus invited, Frank Powell introduced Faro Fred, and the four men, including Monk Harris, ranged themselves in front of the bar of the Gold Brick to "take suthin'" in the language of the border.

Having dashed off a glass to "better acquaintance," William Blackstone glanced over the room, and seeing that it was nearly full of loungers, who always assembled to see the stage come in, made himself "solid" with all I saying:

"Gentlemen, will you not all join me in a drink?"

Would they?

The movement toward the bar in solid platoons answered the question, and Jacques and his assistants were at once busy dispensing drinks to the always-thirsty, after which the stranger went in to get some dinner, accompanied by the doctor, while those he left behind him voted him a "white man, clean through, an' squar' as shootin'."

Monk Harris then told how he had enlivened the trip by his stories and songs, and added:

"I doesn't give in, pards, ter but few men in handlin' ther ribbons, but I does crawfish ter him, fer he drives as tho' he were born with ther gift as yer seen when he fetched thet iron-mouthed team up suddint afore ther door."

In the mean time, while his praises were being sung in the bar-room, William Blackstone was eating his dinner with the relish of a hungry man, and at the same time chatting to Dr. Powell and joking Plug Chew, the Chinese, who waited upon him.

Not a mention was made of the fortune left him, and only as the two sat smoking on the piazza half an hour afterward, did the stranger ask:

"How far is the cabin of poor Ed Elgin from here, doctor?"

"About six miles."

"I would have time to go there and back before dark?"

"Oh, yes, and I will accompany you with pleasure, for you will need a guide."

"Plug Chew?"

"Yes, doctor," and the Chinese appeared at the doctor's call for him.

"Tell my man to saddle both the black and bay, and bring them round at once."

Plug Chew looked as though he would like to tarry to argue the matter as to whether the stranger had not better ride another horse than the one the doctor intended for him, but seeing Frank Powell was in no humor for fooling, he scampered away, and soon after two superb animals were led around to the door.

"Take your choice, Mr. Blackstone, for both are fine riders," said the doctor.

The stranger threw himself into the saddle of the bay, which was nearest to him, and the doctor mounting the black, they rode away together.

"This is a sad inheritance to me, Doctor Powell, coming as it does through the terrible ending of those I loved as I did poor Elgin and his wife," remarked William Blackstone, as the two cantered along on the mountain trail.

"It certainly is a sad affair, sir, and one attended with mystery, for I knew not that Elgin had a foe, noble fellow that he was."

"If robbery was the cause of the act, it seems strange that so little should have been taken from what was stolen; it could not have been but a thousand or two."

"Perhaps some one may have been in love with Mrs. Elgin, and sought to get rid of her husband, and she has taken her own life," suggested Blackstone.

"Ah! such might be a theory for the act, though she could never have given herself the wound which she received."

"I did half suspect a gang of wretches who pretended to be miners, but whom I believe are secretly cutthroats, but there being nothing of value missing, which we could discover, leans toward their innocence in this case, though they discovered the bodies."

"Well, I shall do what I can to solve the mystery, as I intend to make Golden Gulch my home."

"Indeed! it is not a place where a man with fortune enough to support him would care to live."

"I have no ties elsewhere, I like a wild life, and one place is as good as another to me, while I know I can be comfortable in a hotel kept as the Gold Brick seems to be."

"Yes, for a border tavern it is well kept; but when I can save up sufficient to seek a home in a more congenial quarter I shall do so."

"There is the cabin, sir."

The two now rode up to the cabin, and the doctor having the key, the door was unlocked and the two entered.

With a respect that raised him in the opinion of Frank Powell, William Blackstone took off his hat, as he crossed the threshold and stood with bowed head, as though in the presence of the dead whom he had loved.

The furniture of the cabin remained as it was, when the tragedy had occurred, and a perfect quiet rested upon the desolate spot.

"Is the mine of any value?" asked William Blackstone quietly.

"It panned out well for Elgin; but I believe he said he had gotten out about all the metal," answered the doctor.

"Well, it will be time to work that when I need it," said Blackstone, and then the two went to the little vale in the mountain, where Elgin and his wife were buried.

A cross, painted white was at the head of the double grave and into it was skillfully carved:

"IN MEMORY OF

A NOBLE MAN AND A TRUE WOMAN,

KNOWN IN THE MINES AS

ELEGANT ED AND HIS ANGEL,

but whose names were Edgar Elgin and Lois his wife.

Born in the far East, misfortune drove them to the land of the setting sun where they now rest forever."

"A pretty tribute to them, and a just one."

"What friend did this?" said William Blackstone, standing by the grave with uncovered head.

"I did."

"They seemed so far above those who dwell in this wild land, that they won my sympathy and friendship, and I wished not their grave to remain unmarked," said Frank Powell.

"I thank you," simply returned the heir, and the two walked back to their horses, and set out for Golden Gulch.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRICE OF LIFE.

THE *carte blanche* order given to Jacques the barkeeper of the Gold Brick, to fill Boss Bender and his comrades with rum, or whatever liquor

their tastes might crave, was in a fair way of being successful, when the arrival of the stage, with William Blackstone on the box, created an excitement which caused the thoughts of the trio to run in another channel.

"I say, pards, I wants to speak with yer," said Bender, drawing Shorty and Pegleg aside.

"Waal?" was the question of each, when they got out of earshot.

"Waal it hain't waal, fer thet Magic Doctor were hintin' ag'in' us ter-day 'bout thet Elgin trouble in ther hills, an' now ther heir hes come he may be sot ter trail up ther mystery."

"We don't know nothin' 'bout ther murder, only thet ther brother o' ther gal did ther killin'!" growled Pegleg.

"Thet are so, but we found out the murder, an' as we can't produce the murderer, they may lay it ter us."

"I sees," said Shorty.

"Yas, an' it wu'dn't take much for them ter hunt us close ef they thought so."

"They didn't find nothin' stole," said Shorty.

"They doesn't know what Elegant Ed had laid up, an' tuk what were thar fer all."

"Waal, I don't see as we kin do nothin' until they makes a break ag'in' us, an' then we hes ter prove our innocence by our good characters," remarked Pegleg.

"Yas, but I fears our good characters won't wade in these heur parts, pards," said Bender.

"Has yer anything ter perpose?" asked Shorty.

"I guesses we hed better call ther gang ter my cabin ter-night, an' then see what is ter be did."

"Now come, and let us git back ter drink up a leetle more on ther doctor's credit."

This proposition of Bender was agreed in with alacrity, and the two went back to the bar-room, where Jacques called out:

"What! have you gone out and sobered up, and come back ter liquor up ag'in'?"

"We hes not sobered up, pard, an' we hes come back ter face ther bar ag'in'."

"I takes a leetle gin," said Bender, and his comrades followed suit.

As they dashed off the liquor, Doctor Powell and William Blackstone came out of the dining-room and took seats upon the piazza, and Shorty overheard the plan of the two, to ride up to the cabin of Elegant Ed, and at once whispered the fact to Bender.

A wink of the latter to Pegleg and the precious trio of rascals left the bar-room together.

"Pards, I hes a idee," said Bender.

"Waal?"

"They goes up to ther cabing o' Elegant Ed?"

"Yas."

"Waal, it won't do for us seven ter be know'd in ther matter; but thar is fellers as kin do us a favor."

"What does yer mean, boss?"

"I means, Shorty, that you and Pegleg had better go arter t'others of ther gang, an' we'll all go up ter ther hotel, an' drink on invitation of ther Magic Doctor; fer ef he invites one o' us, it means all."

"Waal, we bein' thar, can't be suspected o' doin' no killin', ef killin' is did."

"But who are ter be kilt?" asked Shorty.

"Why, them two, ther Magic Doc and ther strange pilgrim, rides up to ther cabing, an' ef somebody kills 'em on ther way back, why yer see ther'll be no more trouble fer us."

"Yer is right, boss."

"In course I is, Pegleg, fer I allus is nigh right, when I hain't wrong."

"But who are ter do ther killin', Boss?"

"Now you leave thet ter me, and git ther boys an' be at ther hotel, whar I'll jine yer."

"Mind yer, no gittin' drunk, no matter how much yer drinks, an' ef ther Doc an' the pilgrim turns up the'r toes, in course you hester help me pay fer ther work."

"That are but squar', boss," answered Pegleg, and Shorty nodded assent.

Then the three separated, Bender hastening away toward a mining-camp where dwelt more loafers than workers.

In a dilapidated cabin he found a very hard specimen of the *genus homo*, engaged upon scratching an air out of a fiddle which needed laying up for repairs.

The man had a dark, villainous face, one to dread at all times.

He was attired in a ragged suit of clothes, but his revolvers were handsome weapons, and his knife gold-bilted.

"Waal, boss, yer don't mean ter say yer hes come ter pay me a visit?" cried the man, tossing the violin and bow into his bunk, and kicking a vicious-looking dog off a chair, which he offered to his visitor.

"Yas, Bowie Knife Jack, I jist dropped in ter see yer," answered Boss Bender.

"Some wo't yer wants done thet yer is skeert ter do ye self, Boss, I'll bet yer high."

"I wants yer ter do a leetle job, Jack, but it hain't because I is aferd, but because I wants yer ter make a leetle dust, fer times hev gone bad with yer of late."

"Yas, I gets streaks o' ill-fortun' now and then, pard, and I hes one now: but what does yer want did?"

"Kin yer git help?"

"Oh! it are more than I can tackle, are it?"

"It are quite some fer one man ter git away with, Jack."

"Won't you go 'long!"

"No, fer I wants you ter make all ther dust."

"Yas, I see."

"Waal, Boss, as yer hes twice saved my life, an' I hesn't returned ther service, I'll do what I kin fer yer."

"Now, who are it?"

"Thar is two persons goin' up ter Elegant Ed's cabin this arternoon—say—see thar!" and Bender pointed to the wood some distance away, where the horsemen were riding along.

"I sees 'em."

"One is ther Magic Doctor, an' I doesn't know t'other," said the man addressed as Bowie Knife Jack.

"Yas, waal, them is ther two I wants kilt."

"When?"

"This arternoon."

"Ef I picks a quarrel with ther Doc, I hes ter be awful lively on ther draw, fer he are lightnin', an'—"

"Yer don't want no quarrel, fer yer see they is goin' up ther mountain, an' they is comin' back ter-night."

"Yas."

"Now, yer kin git somebody ter help yer, lay fer 'em at Cedar Canyon, an' knock 'em over so quick they won't know what hit 'em."

"That are so."

"Kin yer git a pard?"

"Yas."

"Who?"

"Idle Jim."

"He are wuss'n a old woman fer crackin' what he knows."

"I knows it."

"He'll give yer away."

"No, fer he are a dead-shot, an' soon as we hev shot, then I'll drop Idle Jim, an' thet will settle ther thing."

"Thet are a good idee, Jack; but whar is Jim?"

"At his cabin, fer I see him go thar a leetle while ago."

"Good! thet settles it."

"No, pard, thet jist arranges it, an' now we'll settle," was the suggestive response.

"Yas, waal, what does yer value ther sarvice yer is ter render at?"

"Thar is two men?"

"Yas."

"Ther doctor an' ther pilgrim with him?"

"Yas."

"Who gets ther perkisites?"

"Ther what?"

"What loose dust, dimints, an' sich thet they hes about ther clothin'?"

"You does."

"Waal, I'll do ther job fer you durned cheap, Boss."

"What does yer call cheap?"

"Call it a hundred."

"It's a barg'in, an' I'll add another hundred when ther work is done."

"Come to my cabin ter-night."

"Yas, fer t'other hundred, but I'll take ther fust now."

Bender took out his buckskin purse and paid the money, and then hastily returned toward the hotel, while the hired assassin, throwing his rifle across his shoulder, strolled down to a cabin not far away, and entered it.

Soon after he emerged, accompanied by another individual, whose appearance gave him dead away as a hard citizen even in that hard community, and the two walked away toward the mountains, bent upon the commission of a crime.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AMBUSH.

THE two horsemen, Dr. Frank Powell and William Blackstone, started upon their return to Golden Gulch, with no idea that a foul plot had been arranged against them.

As for the doctor he was wont to ride alone many miles through the mountains, visiting mining-camps where his professional services were needed, and he knew no such word as fear.

Now and then he had been waylaid upon the trail, by some impecunious scamp who sought to get a rich stake, and invariably the robber had come off second best, and twice had the doctor ridden on to Golden Gulch, after such a meeting, and paid some idler to go back to the scene to bury his dead assailant.

William Blackstone too, to look squarely into his face, seemed to be a man devoid of fear, and, if he had dread of meeting a foe, there was that about him which showed he was equal to an emergency of a desperate nature.

Conversing upon matters in general, and especially about Golden Gulch, where William Blackstone said he intended residing, they rode on with no thought of danger.

"So you think there is no way I can invest

my money about Golden Gulch?" asked Blackstone.

"No investment that will pan out well, that I can see."

"Of course you can buy out some claims; but will they yield paying dust?"

"Then the Gulch will never be anything of a place to make real estate here of any value."

"How would a gambling dive pan out?"

Frank Powell was surprised, but did not show it.

He had not suspected William Blackstone as being a man to run a gambling-hell.

True, Faro Fred was a most courtly gentleman in manner, and a noble fellow at heart, and many a professional card-player the doctor had met who was every inch a man, and a good man, too; but then his companion did not look like one of the kind who lived by the turn of a card.

William Blackstone had told him he had once been rich, and had come West to seek a fortune, but had met with indifferent success.

More of him he did not know, and in answer to his question as to how a gambling saloon would thrive, answered:

"There are several there now, and one kept by the gentleman to whom I introduced you."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Fairbanks?"

"Yes, Faro Fred they call him, and he is a square, good fellow, and his saloon is the respectable one of the Gulch."

"Then I shall not run opposition to him, but look up some other way to invest my money—What is it, doctor?"

"Show no sign that you dread danger, but I distinctly saw a man's head lowered over the top of yonder rock."

"Be ready to draw your revolver and charge with me into the canyon beyond the rock, when we come within easy range," coolly said Frank Powell, and in an almost indifferent tone William Blackstone answered:

"All right; but what have we to fear, doctor?"

"Our going to the cabin of Elegant Ed was known, and it may be that some impecunious desperado may suspect that you have your fortune with you."

"He'll get lead instead of gold," was the laconic response.

"He'll deserve it."

"But we must not be taken unawares, for the Cedar Canyon ahead has been the scene of many a deadly ambush."

"It looks like a good place for an assassin."

"It is, if he fires at close range and is a good shot."

"But do you see the cedars beyond that large rock?"

"Yes."

"When we reach the rock we will wheel short off to the right, and dash into the cedars, and that will bring us into the canyon, through a narrow pass, directly behind any one who is watching at the entrance for us to go by, and I can quickly tell whether they are there for mischief, as I know every man for leagues around."

"I'll be governed by you, doctor," was the reply, and a moment after William Blackstone added:

"I, too, see a face over the bowlder, but it has disappeared now."

"Then mischief is meant, so be ready."

A moment after the two horsemen passed a large bowlder, some sixty paces from the entrance to a canyon penetrating the hills, and instantly, at a signal from the doctor, the horses sprang away to the right and dashed into a thick clump of cedars.

"Follow me!" cried Frank Powell, and he urged his horse along a deer path through the cedars, and then between two walls of rock, to suddenly dash out into the canyon.

A second after, William Blackstone dashed to his side just as two shots were fired in quick succession from the side of the canyon, and the horse ridden by the doctor went down with a bullet in his brain.

Then other shots followed, and Blackstone reeled and fell from his saddle just as two men bounded out of cover, their revolvers in hand.

They were Bowie Knife Jack and Idle Jim, and ere they took a second step they were dropped in their tracks by Frank Powell's unerring aim.

"You have killed them, doctor, but I fear they have done for me!" cried William Blackstone, rising upon his elbow, as he lay upon the ground where he had fallen.

Springing to his side, Frank Powell tore open his shirt and examined the wound, which was in the right side.

"I hope and believe not."

"Come, I must carry you with all haste to the hotel."

The well-trained horse, obedient to his master's call, came trotting up to his side, and as quickly as he could the doctor mounted, and drew the wounded man up in front of him.

Then he urged the noble animal forward at a rapid canter, knowing that he would keep his feet in spite of the rough trail and his double load.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOLDEN GULCH EXCITED.

THE Gold Brick was "booming" with a crowd of patrons, when Frank Powell dashed up to the door and reined in his panting, foam-covered horse.

The entire Seven Stars were there, carrying out their programme of getting drunk at the expense of the doctor, Jacques telling them that he would "set 'em up," as long as they would "put 'em down," for it was according to instructions, and he added, to a bosom pard:

"I'm fillin' 'em with the worst tanglefoot out o' New Jersey, as Doc hopes they'll git inter a row an' do suthin' ter git wiped out or strung up, fer they is a noosince, hain't they?"

The friend did not gainsay this, and having whispered around the confidential communication of Jacques, many remained to see what the upshot would be, Faro Fred's Temple losing patrons in consequence of the expected fun at the Gold Brick.

The Seven Stars were under good headway when the doctor rode up, and those who were watching them were taking a sociable drink or two also, so that Jacques and his assistants had their hands full in dispensing the intoxicating cup.

Presently into the hallway strode Doctor Powell, bearing in his arms the insensible form of William Blackstone, for the wounded man had been unconscious the last two miles of the trail.

It was after dark, and the lamps were lighted in the hotel, and cast a glare upon the doctor and the form he bore, causing a sensation at once.

Springing to his side, Major Simon Suggs, the proprietor of the Gold Brick, cried out:

"For God's sake! doctor, what is the matter?"

"We were ambushed upon the mountains and he was shot, while my horse was killed," was the reply.

"Dead?"

"No; but badly wounded and the chances against him. Quick, major, come to his room with all that is necessary to care for him," and Frank Powell was moving on toward the stairs, when a voice said in tones loud enough to be heard by all:

"I guesses that if ther pilgrim dies, ther Magic Doctor gits his dust, and it do look suspicious."

Frank Powell wheeled upon the speaker and fixing his flashing eyes upon him, asked sternly:

"What looks suspicious, Danger Dan?"

Caught as he was, the man had no chance to back out, and in fact was noted as one who never backed down, and he answered bluntly:

"I says that you holds ther pilgrim's dust in keepin', rides out with him, an' fetches him back dyin' or dead, an' it do look as though you hed shootin' him fer keeps."

A deathlike silence fell upon all at this, and then, to the surprise of all, Frank Powell made no reply, but turning on his heel strode on, still bearing his load.

At the third step of the stairs he turned and said quietly:

"Danger Dan, when I dress this man's wound I will come down and settle with you."

A cheer broke from the crowd at this, for some seemed to fear that their dearly-loved doctor was going to let the desperado bully him.

When Powell had disappeared, followed by Major Simon Suggs and Plug Chew, the Chinese, the latter bearing materials for dressing the stranger's wound, drinks were called for by all, and to many present Danger Dan was a hero.

He was a herculean formed fellow, possessing great brute strength, and with a face that did not belie his character, which was that of a mischief-maker and bully of the worst stripe.

He was armed with three revolvers and a bowie, and had been in more desperate frays than any man in the mines, it was said.

Once through an attack of illness Frank Powell had tenderly cared for him, and he was thought to be the doctor's friend, and many were surprised at his words.

But they were explained by the desperado himself, who said:

"Pards, I hadn't oughter said what I did, but I were put up to it by Boss Bender here, and it jist slipped out."

"But you all knows me, an' kin understand that, hev'n' breathed them words, I hain't ther man ter swallow 'em, an' when the Doc comes back yer'll jist see sich a cirks as yer never seen afore, fer he is unchained lightning on ther rampage, an' I ain't backward in comin' forward, an' I'll supply the thunder."

"Life is short, gents, death is suddint in Golden Gulch, an' I hes a leetle dust, so we'll hev a drink at my expense."

Boss Bender had shrunk back at the allusion to him, for he had put the desperado up to the insult offered the doctor, hoping to start the Vigilantes at work instantly against him, but at the invitation to drink he stepped instantly forward, whispering to Shorty, who was by his side:

"I say, Shorty, what in thunder were ther matter with them two fools as went out ter hunt ther Doc an' ther Pilgrim?"

"Dunno; guess they got scooped," was the

low reply of Shorty, while in a loud tone he called out:

"I are drinkin' gin this time, Jacques."

Nearly all present accepted Danger Dan's invitation to drink, Jacques having remarked to a few who hung back:

"Come, gents, 'tain't right ter refuse a dyin' man nothin', fer arter Doc comes back Dan will hev ter die."

This argument was unanswerable, and the drinks went round, Danger Dan giving the toast:

"Here ter my lead pill doin' ther Doc more harm, pards, than his medicine pills ever did me good."

As he was raising the glass to his lips there came a sharp report, and it was shivered to atoms in his hand, and all eyes fell upon Frank Powell, who had the desperado covered, and said sternly:

"Danger Dan, I do not wish to kill you, and my revolver covers your heart, so do not make me fire."

"Yer stole in on me like a coyote, an' yer hes bored a hole through my hand," growled Danger Dan, still holding his hand up as when the glass was in it, and from which drops of blood fell upon the floor.

"You lie, sir, for I came openly into this room, as many who saw me will vouch, and never drew until you turned. But I do not care for your life upon my hands, and I tell you frankly, I will spare you, and give you just one hour to get out of Golden Gulch."

"Does yer mean ter say yer kin drive me out o' Golden Gulch?" almost shrieked the desperado.

The doctor smiled, and softly said, while in the silence that rested upon all a whisper could have been heard:

"Yes, Daniel Duncan of the Fifth Cavalry, I said I would give you one hour to leave Golden Gulch!"

The bully started, his face became livid, and he trembled violently, for he seemed to feel that he stood in the presence of one who knew him.

"Will you go, or shall I pull trigger, Danger Dan?"

"I'll go," was the low reply.

"Then go!"

The strong man's head drooped upon his breast, and, with the air of one utterly crushed, he staggered, rather than walked out of the bar-room.

At the door he turned and silently raised his clinched fist and shook it at the doctor, while his lips moved, though no words issued from them.

Then he wheeled and bounded away in the darkness, while the crowd seemed utterly dazed by what had happened.

But Frank Powell broke the spell with:

"What will you drink, gentlemen, for I confess I need a stimulant after the last hour's work."

"Is he dead, Doc?" asked Jacques.

"You mean Mr. Blackstone?"

"Yes."

"No, I extracted the bullet far more easily than I thought I could, and the chances are in his favor."

"And who were it ther ambushed yer, doctor?" asked Boss Bender.

"Two men in the camp known as the Devil's Half Acre."

"They answered to the names of Bowie Knife Jack and Idle Jim."

"And whar is they now?"

"If you feel a desire to bury them, you will find them lying in Cedar Canyon where I left them," was the cool reply.

With a muttered oath Bender left the saloon, followed by his satellites in no enviable mood at the failure of their hirelings to accomplish the work set for them, for they feared that the mystery of the Elgins' death might be solved, and if so, the part they played in the affair, against the brother of the murdered woman, and the robbery of Lucky Pete, would surely come out.

To prevent this, the doctor and William Blackstone must die, was the unanimous decision of the gang.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SCENE AT CEDAR CANYON.

FOR some minutes, after the clatter of the hoof-falls, of the horse ridden by Frank Powell, died away, all was quiet in Cedar Canyon.

The sun was beyond the mountain, and deep shadows were falling in the canyon.

The birds were hunting their nests in the thickets, and a coyote, scenting blood, was yelping not far away, as though, fearing to venture alone, he was calling his kind to the feast in the canyon.

There lay the two human beings and the horse, where they had fallen, and the scene was certainly one of desolation.

Presently one of the human forms moved.

The head was softly raised and the eyes peered around.

Then the man sprang to his feet, showing no sign of a death-wound, though upon his cheek was a gash where the bullet had cut its way.

"Waal! waal! that were a close call fer you."

Bowie Knife Jack, an' ef yer hints to ther contrary yer lies," he said, addressing himself.

"Thet Doc are a whooper on ther shoot, an' I doesn't blame him thet he didn't kill me; but he left his mark upon my cheek, but seeing as I bes a leetle too much o' thet ornamin't, I kin stand it ef he kin."

"It were a good thought o' mine ter tumble, when I felt ther sting o' ther bullet: but I is resurrected that are sartin, and it is more than kin he did by Idle Jim."

"No, he is did fer," and the desperado stepped to the body of his less fortunate companion and turned him over on his back.

"No, thet am death thet bes got its grip on him, thet are sartin."

"Say, Jim, wake up, old feller!"

"Hev a game o' kerrd-f?"

The body remained motionless, for life had left it as the bullet struck him.

"Waal, I'll try yer onst more, an' ef thet don't rouse yer, then yer is gone across ther river."

"Say, Jim, hev a drink?"

There remained a dead silence, and then the desperado continued:

"Waal, he's gone, an' I'll jist take back thet fifty dollars I give him, bein' as he won't need it whar he is goin'."

Bending over he searched the pockets of the dead man, transferring all that he found there to his own, and buckling on his belt of arms, turned to depart, when he started back at seeing a person attentively regarding him, and at the same time covering him.

The stranger was a man of athletic form, was clad in black pants, stuck in top-boots of a handsome pattern, and wore a blue flannel shirt with wide, turn over collar, beneath which was a black silk scarf tied in a sailor knot.

About his slender waist was a belt with a gold buckle, and his revolvers were pearl-handled and gold-mounted, while a large bowie-knife which he carried had a hilt that was a miniature statue of an Indian warrior in bronze, with a bow and arrow of the same metal forming the guard.

Behind the stranger, and some twenty feet distant, stood a large, splendidly limbed and bodied horse, upon which were saddle and bridle of handsome workmanship.

The stranger's appearance was that of a man who had perfect confidence in himself, and his face was stern and resolute.

His age it was hard to tell, for, though he appeared fresh and youthful in the face, his hair was iron-gray.

The eyes were dark, and seemed full of sadness, but the mouth was scornful, and firm to sternness.

It was a handsome face, and one to win confidence, and command respect.

"Waal, I is Bowie Knife Jack o' Golden Gulch, thet are my pard, Idle Jim—or what is left o' him; and who is you?" said the desperado, in a bullying kind of tone.

"I am a miner, sir, and I am on my way to Golden Gulch, where I wish to buy a claim. My name is Hale," was the calm reply.

"I see, I see, pard; but yer'll soon git another name in Golden Gulch, ef yer sticks ter yer fine airs," rudely said the desperado.

"And what will that be?"

"Kid Gloves."

"Ah! you refer to the fact that I wear gloves?" and the stranger's eyes flashed slightly.

"I does, an' yer can't be much o' a man ter wear 'em."

"My friend, I am enough of a man to take you into Golden Gulch and deliver you up as an intended assassin," was the cool reply.

"Yer don't mean it!" and the face of the desperado changed color.

"I do mean it, for I heard the shots fired, saw a horseman ride rapidly away bearing a wounded comrade with him, and heard your words as you arose to your feet."

"Come! up with your hands!"

"Now, look here, pard. I hain't done you no harm," whined the bully.

"Nor do I intend that you shall. Up with your hands, sir!"

There was no doubting the tone of the stranger, and with an oath, Bowie Knife Jack raised his hands above his head.

Stepping up to him, the stranger unbuckled the belt from about his waist, called his horse to his side, and as the obedient animal trotted up, hung it over the horn of his saddle.

Then he took a lariat from about the horn, and in a very few seconds had securely bound his prisoner.

"Say, pard, I bes some dust with me, and ef yer lets me git away, I'll give it to yer."

"No; I'll carry you on to the camp, for I think, from your general appearance and the mischief you have have just been caught in, that you are wanted there."

"Now, sir, move off, and strike the trail for Golden Gulch."

The desperado squirmed, and said:

"Pard, does yer know what will foller my goin' thar?"

"No."

"Does yer know the Magic Doctor?"

"I do not."

"Waal, he are a terror: an' when he sees me an' shouts, ther boys will jist rise me to a tree."

"It will be no more than you deserve, doubtless."

"But, move on!"

The desperado dared not disobey, and slowly moved on down the trail, the horseman following and watching his prisoner closely, that he did not bound into the thickets or among the rocks upon either side.

At last the lights of Golden Gulch came in sight, and reaching a spot where several trails led off to the different camps, Bowie Knife Jack determined to take the one that would take him by his own camp, in the locality known as the Devil's Half Acre, and where the worst men of the mines dwelt.

Once within that, to him, sacred precinct, and he did not doubt but that he could summon enough of the rough element to his side to rescue him from his captors, and thus give him a chance to emigrate from Golden Gulch before the truth of his action in the affair at Cedar Canyon came out.

"That is not the way, sir, to the Gold Brick House," said his captor, sternly, as Bowie Knife Jack turned into the trail leading to the camp, which it had the reputation of being claimed by his Satanic Majesty as his special half-acre of wickedness.

"It are ther nearest cut."

"It is not."

"Perhaps you know better than I does?"

"I know that this trail leads to the hotel, and thither I am going."

"Waal, I is tired, and I k'n save hoof-travel by this way."

"No argument, sir, but go the way I command you," and hearing the click of the cocking of a revolver, the desperado marched on as directed, muttering curses not loud but deep at his disappointment.

CHAPTER XV.

A MAN THAT KEPT HIS WORD.

ALTHOUGH he was thwarted in taking the trail through his own camp, Bowie Knife Jack was not wholly hopeless, and warily began to look about him for some other means of escape.

He knew that he had been recognized by Frank Powell, and that the doctor had believed that he had killed him, or he would never have left Cedar Canyon without another look at him.

Should he be taken by his captor to the hotel, then the story would at once come out that he had ambushed the doctor and the stranger, William Blackstone, upon their way from the Elgin cabin, and tried to kill them, and this would, without doubt, bring the suspicion of the Golden Gulchite upon him as the murderer of Elegant El and his Angel.

"It'll take jist six minutes by ther clock in ther Gold Brick office to try me, find me guilty, sentence me an' hang me up ter a tree which I knows as hes been made useful afore fer jist sich characters as I be," he muttered to himself, as he plodded along.

"Oh, it's a clear case," he continued. "I were thar, Idle Jim were kilt, an' I got picked up on ther spot arterwards."

"Ther Doc, when he do git mad, jist sails to ther front as ther maddest man I ever seen, an' it hain't likely he'll be pleased at bevin' missed, fer he goes fer dead shootin' every time."

"Waal, he didn't miss me so durned nice anyhow, fer my cheek feels as ef I'd had a tooth carpenter foolin' at my chawers—hello! Ef thar don't come a gang, I are a liar."

He half-bated, but again moved forward at a stern order from his captor, and examining the crowd closely which had attracted his attention coming through the darkness, he muttered:

"It are ther Seven Stars."

"Now is yer chance, Jack, fer it are ther duty o' Boss Bender ter rescoo yer."

The horseman also saw the forms of men coming through the darkness, but seemed to pay no heed to them, and soon they met face to face.

Instantly the desperado shouted out:

"Ho, pards! Boss, it are me, your dear pard, Jack, that are bein' led like a lamb to ther slaughter."

He swayed one side, as he uttered the first word, as though to mingle with those whose protection he claimed, but instantly the horseman spurred to his side, and the muzzle of a revolver was pressed hard against his head, while he heard the stern words:

"Silence, sir, and move on, or I will kill you!"

"What is it, pard, thet yer hes got Jack tied up like a dog fer?" asked Boss Bender, recognizing his hireling, and realizing the fact that he was not dead, as he had believed, and hoped, when he saw that Doctor Powell and William Blackstone had not been killed.

"That is none of your business, my man, and I order you out of my path," was the prompt response of the horseman.

Boss Bender motioned to his comrades to back him up, and peered eagerly into the face of the horseman, in a vain effort to recognize him.

Bowie Knife Jack dead was far better than

alive, for his tongue could then tell no ugly tales.

But if he made no effort to free him from captivity he knew that the desperado would doubtless give him a way in revenge.

So he determined that the stranger must give up his prisoner, so he said:

"Pard, yer hes a friend o' thar, an' I hain't ther man ter see him suffer 'thout tryin' ter help him."

"What he hev did tu you, I does not know; but I does know thet you hed better give him up an' save trouble."

"What trouble?" coolly asked the horseman.

"Fer yerself."

"I do not fear you, or your gang, and I warn you not to interfere, for this man I intend to carry up to the hotel and turn him over to an officer of the law, for I know that he attempted to commit murder, if he did not accomplish it."

"Waal, I says yer sha'n't hev our pard," boldly said Bender, and turning to his comrades he continued:

"Shall he, pards?"

"Nary."

"It hain't in him ter take him."

"Not any."

"You bet he sha'n't."

"You is shoutin' Boss."

"No, Jack, he hes got ter relinkish yer."

Such were the bold responses to the questions of their leader; and seeing the tide set so strongly in his favor, Bowie Knife Jack said:

"Pard, yer hes 'em ag'in' yer, an' I'll tell yer for luck, thet it are Boss Bender an' his gang."

"I care not who they are, I carry you with me."

"They be ther Seven Stars, an' it hain't in 'em to back down, as yer w'd know, ef yer wasn't a stranger in these heur diggin's."

"Come, I'll have no more of this nonsense, for I intend to take my prisoner with me, dead or alive."

"Yer can't do it, pard, so ye'd better give in."

The horseman made no reply to Bender, but to his prisoner he said:

"Move on, sir, and if these men crowd me I will kill you."

"Knowing your fate you will order them off or your death follows."

"Does yer mean it, pard?" asked the desperado in a voice that trembled.

"Try me," was the laconic response.

"Pards, yer hears him shout, so don't crowd, I begs yer," pleaded the wretch.

But Boss Bender had made up his mind what to do.

He cared nothing for the desperado, but he cared much for himself.

If Bowie Knife Jack was taken on to the Gold Brick, there he would meet Doctor Powell, and then Bender feared that his part as the man who hired the desperado, for the work would come out.

If Bowie Knife was shot down, why then death silenced his tongue and he, Bender, was safe.

Instantly he determined to accomplish this end, and with no pity for the wretch, and yet seemingly devious of rescuing him, he cried:

"Don't you fear, Jack, he won't dare hurt yer."

"Yas he will, or his face lies ag'in' him, fer I hes seen him by daylight, an' he's got it in him."

"Don't crowd him, Bender, boy!"

"I says he won't dare harm yer."

"Come, pards, an' let us rescoo our poor unfortunate friend!"

As he spoke, Boss Bender sprung forward and grasped the shoulder of Bowie Knife Jack with one hand, while in the other he held a revolver.

At the same instant his companions moved across the trail.

But hardly had the hand of Bender touched the shoulder of the wretch, when there followed a flash and report, and, without even a groan, Bowie Knife Jack sunk to the ground.

Instantly whipping out another revolver the daring horseman leveled them at his foes, and asked quickly:

"Do you bar my way, fellows?"

"No, pard, we hes no quarrel with you; but I guesses the Vigilantes will make yer swing fer killin' thet poor man," answered Bender, who had given a signal to his comrades not to attempt a fight with the stranger.

"Then stand aside from my path, and if you set the Vigilantes upon my trail you will find me at the Gold Brick Hotel."

"As that man appears to be your friend, give him burial," and so saying, the horseman rode on, the Seven Stars standing aside to allow him to pass.

As he disappeared in the distance, Bender said:

"Pards, he hev done us a sarvice in killin' Jack, fer we'd hev been peached on sartin."

"But we must git thet bold peacock done fer, so pick up ther body an' fetch it ter ther hotel, an' we'll start ther ball rollin' ter git ther Vigilantes at him."

The body of the dead ruffian was at once raised in the arms of several of the gang, and the party started for the Gold Brick to place the chief against the man who had so defied them.

and daringly kept his word, and who had muttered as he rode away from the spot:
"Well, thus ends the first scene in the drama I have to play."

CHAPTER XVI.

A BOLD MAN AT BAY.

"Yes, the first act of the drama has begun.
"How will the last act end?"
So murmured the horseman again as he rode on toward the Gold Brick after the tragedy which Bender and his band had forced upon him.
Riding up to the stables of the hotel, he gave his horse in charge of an attendant, with the admonition to take the best care of him, if he desired good recompense.
Then he strode boldly into the hotel, and, walking up to the register, took up a pen and wrote his name simply:
"HORACE HALE, Miner."
Major Simon Suggs was there to beam upon him his genial smile of welcome, and say:
"Glad to see you, Mr. Hale."
A quick glance at the bold handwriting had shown the name to the major.
"Stop any time, sir?"
"I have come to stay, sir, if I can stake or buy a claim here," was the quiet answer.
"We can give you a pleasant room and best of board if you honor us with your presence."
"I shall remain at least until I am settled upon my own claim, sir."
"Then you wish as pleasant quarters as I can give you?"
"Yes, thank you."
"Plug Chew, take the gentleman's traps to room number 10."
"Number ten, sir?" asked the stranger.
"Yes, it is one of three rooms in a wing, and the two others are occupied by the doctor of our town and a rich gentleman who has just arrived, and is laid up from an accident."
"I will take number ten, sir, for I rather like the number," answered Horace Hale, with a strange look upon his bold, handsome face.
"Now, sir, I'll order you some supper, and then come in with me to get an appetizer."
"Thank you, sir; I happen to be one of those strange inconsistencies—a miner who does not drink."
"That is startling, indeed; but you'll have a cigar to smoke after supper, sir?"
"Nor do I smoke, sir."
"Ah! one would think you were going to start a temperance revival in our midst, did not your looks prove you to be made of different stuff."
"But the Heathen announces supper, and, as it is late, I trust you will pardon its not being better."
"No excuses are necessary, my dear landlord; but may I ask if you know of two persons having been fired upon to-night up in the mountain, and one either killed or wounded?"
The major started, and glanced more earnestly at his guest.
"I will accompany you in to supper, sir, and we will talk it over," he said.
In spite of the major's excuses and the lateness of the hour, the newly-arrived guest found a very tempting supper set out for him, and he partook of it with the relish of a hungry man.
"Yes, sir," said Major Simon Suggs, after he had seen his guest well helped.
"Yes, sir, there were two persons fired upon late this afternoon in the mountains, and one was seriously wounded."
"So I believed."
"You know of the affair then?"
"I saw it happen, sir."
"Indeed!"
"One of the gentlemen was Doctor Frank Powell, whom the boys call the Magic Doctor, on account of his marvelous cures, for he is our physician and surgeon in Golden Gulch."
"And the other, sir?"
"Was a Mr. William Blackstone of Kansas, who has lately inherited a valuable property here."
"It was in going to see the mine which had fallen to him, that he was shot."
"And you saw it—the shooting, you say?"
"Yes, from a distance, sir, and captured one of the intended assassins, but as an attempt was made to rescue him from me upon my passing through the camps, I killed him."
The major started visibly, and then, in his quiet way, the stranger went on to tell of his experience with the Seven Stars.
He had just concluded, when Major Simon Suggs was called away upon some duty connected with the hotel, and having finished his supper, Horace Hale walked out into the office, and hearing a loud commotion in the bar-room, he started in there.
Upon his entrance every eye was turned upon him, while Boss Bender yelled out:
"Thar he is now, pards!"
The stranger saw before him a large and excited crowd, and in their midst lay the dead body of Bowie Knife Jack, the ghastly wound upon the temple where the bullet had cut its way.
That Boss Bender and his gang had been telling their version of the story, of the desperado's

death there was no doubt, for when the leader of the Seven Stars pointed to him, all started toward him a step or two.

"Well, may I ask why I am thus gamed upon?" quietly queried Horace Hale, stepping back to the wall near the office door.

"We has told how you shot down poor Jack here, and robbed him," said Boss Bender.

"Liar! do you dare accuse me of robbery?" sternly said Horace Hale, growing very pale.

"I does, and my pards backs me in it," was the cool reply. Horace Hale's eyes glanced over the crowd, and he saw that the words of the man had effect upon those before him, and he said:

"Men, that I killed that wretch lying there, I do not deny; but he who says I robbed him lies in his teeth."

The words were calmly uttered, and his appearance carried conviction to some.

But there were others who thirsted for a tragic scene, and here was a chance to have one.

The man was a stranger, and that was against him.

The one slain was a Golden Gulch miner, and that was sufficient to feel that he must be avenged.

One of the crowd now stepped forward and said:

"As an officer of the Vigilante Patrol, sir, I must arrest you, for the charge against you is a severe one, and if those men swear to it, you must hang, for we are determined to make Golden Gulch an orderly place."

"What! would you hang a man upon the testimony of such curs as are those fellows?" scornfully asked Horace Hale.

"We would," was the cool reply.

"You will give me time to prove that they lie?"

"They are seven against one, sir, and you admit the killing, so you must suffer the penalty."

"And that is?"

"You will have to hang for it."

"Then if you want me, take me!" and the miner threw his gloved hands forward, and each of them held a cocked revolver, as he stood at bay, fearless and defiant, in the midst of his foes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DOCTOR AND THE GAMBLER CHIP IN.

WHEN seated at the supper-table with his guest, Major Simon Suggs had noticed one peculiarity about him which he could not account for.

That was the fact that his hands were incased in close-fitting kid gloves, with gauntlets that came up above his wristbands.

The hands were small and delicately shaped, yet seemed to have a grip not to be despised, and the gloves fitted to perfection, and were a dark brown.

But, throughout the meal he did not remove them, and when signing his name upon the register had held the pen in his gloved hand, writing with apparent ease.

Upon his entering the bar-room this peculiarity had struck the eyes of the crowd almost as quickly as had the fact that he possessed a superb form, and handsome, fearless face, while his dress was far above the average of that worn by miners.

That he was a swell miner, no one doubted that gazed upon him; but why was it that he carried his elegance to the extreme of fighting in his kid gloves, for such was certainly his intention, as his hands holding the revolvers were incased in them.

When the bold man took the stand he did, at bay against a mob, urged on by the story told against him by the Seven Stars, he not only surprised his foes, but checked their advance upon him.

They saw that there was that in his face which meant all he said, and those in his immediate front shrunk back from before his threatening revolvers.

But Boss Bender began to nag them on with:
"Pards, he shows his claws, but what is claws ag'in' us?"

"If these gentlemen wish a little sport, and I think they look as though they did, I will ask them to step one side and allow you and your cutthroat gang to clip my claws," and Horace Hale looked squarely into the face of Boss Bender.

That Bender had not bargained for this result was evident, for he slunk back as the crowd cheered the bold proposition of the stranger, one miner shouting out:

"Thet are ther squarest leetle proposish thet hes ever tickled my ear, an' it proves he are game, tooth, toe-nail an' ha'r."

"Sail ter one side, pards, an' jist let Boss Bender an' his sixes take ther stranger in out o' ther wet."

"Yas, Boss, he are your meat, so chew him up," said another.

"Seven ag'in' one hain't squar', pards," yelled another, who had a love for fair play.

"I'll take the chances if you'll turn your dogs loose," said the stranger, with a grim smile.

"Waal, Boss, what hes yer ter say now ag'in' "

doin' yer dooty?" and a huge miner turned to the leader of the Seven Stars.

Thus urged to the front *volens v. lens*, Boss Bender dared not back down from the position in which he had placed himself, so he said, in a blustering tone:

"Does ther pilgrim think thet I is afeerd to tackle him?"

"I refer to you and your gang, Sir Cutthroat."

"You have made a charge against me, and I say that you lie. You have already decided to hang me, so I tell you that it's catching before hanging, and I dare you to come on and take me."

"Music fer ther million!"

"Them derwine sentiments!"

"Ther Kid Gloves means biz."

"He are a terror!"

"I'll w'ar kid gloves arter this, fer it do look wholesome fer pluck!"

"Ef yer kills 'em, Kid Gloves, we won't weep!"

Such were the remarks that went up from the crowd upon every side, and, of course, there could be no other result than to urge on the Seven Stars to the attack.

"Pards, we hes ter do ther biz, an' clip his claws. Don't kill him, fer I wants ter see him hang," said Boss Bender to his comrades.

As if feeling fully what they were called upon to do, the gang of desperadoes ranged themselves in a line, three on either side of their leader, while the crowd hastily swerved to the right and left, to be out of range, and Jacques, in his all-absorbing interest of the affair, sprung upon the bar with a revolver instead of a glass in his hand, and he knew how to handle the former as well as the latter.

The stranger did not move, but stood calm, smiling and defiant, although he knew he looked death squarely in the face.

His eyes were fixed with hawk-like eagerness upon his foes, and his revolvers were cocked and ready.

"Pards, when I says jump, then you hes ter hump it," called out Boss Bender.

Another instant and the rush would have been made, but just then two persons stepped into the bar through the open door leading to the office, and by which Horace Hale stood, and placed themselves upon either side of the man at bay.

A silence like death fell upon the crowd, and in his pleasant way Dr. Powell said:

"Bender, Golden Gulch shall not be disgraced by allowing seven bullies to attack a stranger, so Faro Fred and myself will chip in on his side. Now start the music whenever you are ready," called out Powell.

"Yes, Boss, and I'll sing out the figures for the dance," said Faro Fred, smiling blandly.

"Doc, thet man kilt a miner down in ther camps and robbed him!" yelled Boss Bender.

"You lie, Boss Bender, and you know it, for Major Suggs has told me the story of this man's killing that wretch Bowie Knife Jack."

"Gentlemen, Bowie Knife Jack was the one who ambushed us in Cedar Canyon to-night, and shot down Mr. Blackstone and killed my horse."

"He was accompanied by Idle Jim, another fellow of the same stripe, and I believed that I had killed them both."

"This stranger saw the affair from a distance, and arriving upon the scene after my departure, found that Bowie Knife Jack had resurrected himself, and after robbing his dead comrade, was setting off in flight, when he captured him."

"In bringing him through the camps below, they met Bender and his gang who sought to rescue the prisoner, and this gentleman warned them off or he would kill Jack."

"They pressed on and he kept his word."

"Now you have it square, and I warn any man to press the charge made against this stranger by those seven devils, who should be cast out of Golden Gulch, for they are always fomenting mischief."

"And I indorse the warning of Doc Powell," said Faro Fred, and turning to Horace Hale, he continued:

"I am glad to welcome you, sir, to Golden Gulch."

"My name is Fred Fairbanks, the boys call me Faro Fred, I am a gambler by profession, and I defy any man to lay a mean charge against me."

"This is my pard, Doctor Frank Powell, a white man clean through, and square to his finger-tips, while he is the best medicine man in this country, Injun or pale-face."

The stranger grasped the hand of Faro Fred, and then shook hands warmly with Frank Powell, who said:

"You must meet some of our citizens, sir, for we are not all bad fellows, rough as we look."

"I do not suspect them of being so, sir."

"I was a stranger and appearances were against me, I admit."

"I am not a drinking man, gentlemen, but not that I am against it from principle, only I prefer not to drink; but if you will allow me to take what I please, I will be glad to have you all join me—all excepting that man and his

game, and I now tell them that they must keep out of my path."

He turned boldly toward the Seven Stars as he spoke, and Bender answered:

"Just as you please, Kid Glove Miner; but you mind not for crowd us too."

The invitation of the stranger was accepted with the alacrity of always thirsty souls, and as he left the bar, accompanied by Faro Fred and Doctor Powell, he was voted a "square good fellow from head to heel, if he was a Kid Glove Miner."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KID GLOVE MINER.

THE morning following after the scenes related in the foregoing chapter, Frank Powell came down to breakfast, and reported that his wounded friend was doing well, and he had every hope of his pulling through.

Major Suggs, to whom he made the statement, then informed him that a party of miners had gone at daylight to Cedar Canyon, and had brought back the body of Lyle Jim, which, with that of Bowie Knife Jack, had been prepared for burial by the devils in the quarter known as the Devil's Half Acre, of which locality the two dead men were hard citizens.

"But what do you think of the stranger, doctor?" asked Major Suggs.

"You refer to Blackstone, I suppose."

"No, to the Kid Glove Miner, as the boys call him."

"He belies his looks if he is not an out-and-out good fellow, and that he has nerve is very evident."

"You are right, Doc, he has pluck to sell, and he'll make his mark in Golden Gulch yet, or I am no reader in human nature."

"It was a trifle hard on Bowie Knife Jack, to kill him as he did; but then he but fulfilled his threat, and showed that he was a man of his word."

"Yes, and saved the fellow from being hanged, for had he gotten him to the hotel here, the Vigilantes would have at once strung him up."

"Ah! there he comes now!"

"Yes, he went off for a ride an hour ago, and looks as fresh as a daisy."

"You will breakfast together, for he ate nothing before leaving, and I have put him at the table with you, Faro Fred and Mr. Blackstone."

Just then, Horace Hale having dismounted, came upon the piazza and greeted Frank Powell and the major in his calm, courtly way.

"Got up an appetite for your breakfast, Mr. Hale?" asked the landlord.

"Yes, sir, your mountain air makes me hungry."

"Have you breakfasted, Doctor Powell?"

"No, so we will go in together."

The two men entered the dining-room together, and Plug Chew set before them one of the Gold Brick's most tempting repasts.

After awhile the stranger asked:

"Do you know of any mine that I can buy about here, Doctor Powell?"

"The mines are all paying something, I believe, and none in the market, if you mean individual leads."

"But there are some large mines, owned by men who are organizing stock companies of them, I believe."

"Oh, I merely wanted a small claim, something I could work in myself, and which might pay me a little."

"I am informed that there is a claim in the hills that may be bought."

"It was owned by a miner whose name was Elgin."

"Ah! Elegant Ed as we called him here, your fellow."

"He met with a sad end, I believe?"

"Yes, most sad; and worse still, his lovely wife—known as Ed's Angel by the boys—was killed with him."

"Will you relate the circumstances to me, doctor?" quietly asked Horace Hale.

"There is little to tell, sir."

"Elgin came here with his beautiful wife, and they both won hearts, even those of our roughest men."

"They got that claim up in the mountains, the boys helped Ed put up his cabin, and he struck a good lead, as his work panned out well."

"That he had an enemy, he or his wife, no one believed; and yet, one day, a party of miners, the same with whom you had your trouble last night, went to the cabin and found Elgin and his wife dead."

"He had a bullet in his brain, she had a knife thrust in her heart."

"And the murderer?" asked the stranger.

"Ah! that remains a mystery, for no trace of who did the foul deed could be found."

"Did no one suspect the men who made the discovery?"

"Yes, I did so, and some others had their doubts; but then they were known to regard Elgin highly, were seeking his cabin to sell him some claims he had offered to buy of them, and as not a paper, bank note, pound of dust, or

piece of jewelry seemed to have been taken, it looked as though they were innocent."

"True, one would think so, even men though they seem to be; but did he leave much of a fortune?"

"Yes, half a hundred-thousand."

"Indeed!" and Hale arched his well-defined brows with surprise.

"Yes, there was a paper found among his effects, signed by Ed Elgin and his wife, bequeathing to the person now lying wounded up stairs, and whose name is William Blackstone, all of his property."

"The boys put the matter in my hands, and I wrote Blackstone and had him come here, and it was upon his first visit to the cabin and mine that he had inherited, that he was wounded last evening."

"But he will recover?"

"I feel no doubt of it; and his splendid physique will soon bring him out all right."

"One question more?"

"A dozen, if so you like."

"Will he sell?"

"His mine?"

"Yes, doctor."

"I do not know but that he would."

"When could you ask him?"

"Are you anxious to purchase at once?"

"I am."

"Well, I will ask him during the day."

"Thank you, doctor; and kindly flad out his figure for it."

An hour after, as Horace Hale was seated upon the piazza of the Gold Brick, gazing listlessly down the one street of Golden Gulch, Plug Chew approached him with:

"You Kiddee Glove Mineer?"

"So I believe they call me here," answered Hale, with a slight smile.

"Loctee wantee?"

"The doctor wants me?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Comee, Chinaman, showee."

The miner arose and followed the Chinese up to the room next his own, and at a rap upon the door he was bid enter.

He did so, and found two occupants in the room.

One was a man with black hair and long beard, a pale face, and he lay upon his bed.

The other was Doctor Powell.

"Come in, Mr. Hale."

"This is Mr. Blackstone, the owner of the Elgin mine, and at present my patient, from the wound he received, and of which I told you," said the doctor.

"Be seated, Mr. Hale," said William Blackstone, quietly, gazing into the face of the man of whose pluck, exhibited the night before, Plug Chew had told him.

"I am glad to know that your wound is not dangerous, Mr. Blackstone, and that you are in such skillful hands," said the miner, taking a seat, while the eyes of the wounded man rested upon his kid gloves.

"Thank you, sir."

"The bullet lodged a vital corner, and as the doctor has extracted it I will be myself in a couple of weeks or so."

"But you are desirous of purchasing a mine, the doctor tells me?"

"I am, sir; but I beg you not to worry yourself, unless the doctor says it will not harm you."

"It will not; for I am a hard one to kill, and do not get nervous."

"What do you consider my mine worth?"

"I am no judge, sir, not knowing what it has panned out."

"It has panned out something over fifty thousand for me, through the work of a dear dead friend; but I am told that it has almost touched bed rock."

"I am willing to give a couple of thousand or so, on a venture."

"Call it twenty-five hundred cash."

"Very well, sir, I will pay you that for it."

"No, I never sell anything, Mr. Hale, for I am a natural-born gambler, and get and dispose of everything by chance."

"You can go to work in the mine, and as soon as I am able to get around to Faro Fred's Temple here we will play for the mine."

"I do not quite understand you, Mr. Blackstone," said the miner, in surprise.

"I'll explain."

"I inherited the mine, and with it enough to set me going."

"I am opposed to work, and therefore will never put a pick in the dirt myself, and if I hire a man to dig for me he will steal my share and pay me his wages."

"You say you will give twenty-five hundred cash for the mine?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will stake the mine against that sum and play you for it."

"If you win the mine is yours."

"If I win you lose your money, and must look elsewhere for a mine."

"What do you say?"

Frank Powell gazed fixedly at the miner. He knew that he did not drink nor smoke.

Did he gamble?

Quietly the answer came:

"I accept your terms, Mr. Blackstone."

"Enough, sir."

"Go to work in the mine to-day if you wish, for, if you lose it will not be much trouble to move out, and you are welcome to what you get out of it in the mean time."

"Upon one condition, sir."

"Well?"

"If I lose the money, that you will play me a second game on the same terms."

"Done."

"And a third game, if I lose the second."

"As many as you like, sir, and the more the merrier."

"Thank you."

"Now I will not tire you more," and promising to drop in again and see the wounded man, Horace Hale arose and took his leave.

Going to the office he asked the major to have him a lunch prepared to take with him, and soon after he mounted his horse, and set forth for the Elgin mine.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VISIT TO THE MINE.

AT an easy canter the Kid Glove Miner, as I will now call him, rode along the trail leading to the mountains.

As though familiar with the locality, when he came to half a dozen trails that branched off to the different camps, he turned without hesitation into the one leading to the Elgin mine, and kept on at the same rapid pace, for his horse, without seeming effort, got over the ground at a telling rate.

Ascending the mountain side, he came to Cedar Canyon, and halting there a moment, gazed around him as though recalling the tragedy enacted there the day before.

With a sigh he rode on, and soon after arrived at the cabin of the Elgins.

The key had been given to him by Doctor Powell, at the request of William Blackstone, and staking his horse out, after unsaddling him, he entered the lonely cabin.

As he stepped across the threshold he took off his sombrero, and stood gazing about him with the air of one who appreciated that he was now where he had been saved by the death of the noble man and his wife who had been slain there.

For a long time he stood thus, and then, in a kind of awed way, looked through the little cabin.

"Yes, I will come here to live. This shall be my home, until my mission has ended," he said, in a low tone.

Then he continued:

"It cannot be that he will win every time, and I will stake his price against the mine until I have swamped ten times twenty-five hundred."

So saying he left the cabin, locking the door behind him carefully, and wended his way through the cedars and pines that grew upon the mountain side, until he came to a little nook, sheltered and solitary.

It was the spot where the bodies of Elegant Ed and his Angel had been laid to rest, and where, the day before, Doctor Powell and William Blackstone had stood.

The cross loomed up before him, and his eyes fell upon the mound, already covered with wild flowers, brought from shady mountain dells and planted there by sympathetic hands.

But there was one other object upon which his eyes fell, and which caused him to start, nervy man that he was.

It was the form of a man who stood by the grave, his arms resting upon the top of the wooden cross, and his head resting upon his arms.

"Good God! who can he be?" came from between the teeth of Horace Hale, as he beheld the man, and saw that his attitude was one of abject sorrow.

Who could it be that in that far-away land could mourn so deeply the dead miner and his wife?

The stranger possessed a slender form, of medium height, was dressed as a miner, and had long gold-brown hair, which fell upon his shoulders, and a beard of lighter hue that reached to his waist.

About his small waist was a belt of arms, and his hat, a gray slouch with a broad brim, had fallen, or been thrown down at his feet.

"Ho, my friend, we meet upon a sacred spot," said Horace Hale in his deep calm voice, in which there was a strange pathos.

As the sound of a voice fell upon the ears of the man bending above the grave, a cry broke from his lips, as though wrung from them by fright, and he straightened up and faced the speaker.

But, as his eyes fell upon him he uttered another cry, and motioning with his hands cried in piteous tones:

"No! no! Keep off! keep off!"

"The man is mad," said Horace Hale, and hardly had the words left his lips, when he beheld him reel and fall heavily across the grave.

Springing to his side he knelt over him, and said:

"Why he has swooned away. But where, in Heaven's name, have I seen this face before?"

Somewhere, certainly, and under strange circumstances, but, for the life of me I cannot recall where or when."

Then he rubbed his hands, in an effort to return him to consciousness, and this failing, he remembered that Plug Chew had said, when he gave him his lunch:

"Fixee up good drinkee fer nice Melican man with kidee glovee."

This "good drinkee" he had discovered to be a flask of liquor, and instantly he hastened back to where he had left his horse, to get it from his saddle pocket.

Five minutes perhaps he was gone, and then he returned rapidly to the grave.

But the man was gone.

Astonished, for he had seemingly left him in a dead faint, Horace Hale looked everywhere in the vicinity for him.

But without avail, for the strange being had mysteriously disappeared.

After a short time spent at the double grave, in which he had gazed long and earnestly down upon the mound that hid Elegant Ed and his Angel from human eyes, the miner went on along the well-worn trail to a cleft in the mountains, where was the mine he had been seemingly anxious to obtain.

It was in a wild spot, and there was evidence of much hard work done there.

Carefully the miner looked over the locality, and, after several hours spent there, returned to the cabin.

His horse was where he had left him, and, mounting, he rode slowly homeward.

Just after passing the Cedar Canyon he beheld a man standing by the side of the trail, leaning upon his rifle and apparently awaiting his approach.

As he drew near he was upon his guard, for he knew not what to expect of a person in that wild region, and among a class of men, many of whom were almost as wild as the prowling beasts of the mountains.

But the man made no hostile demonstration, and, as he came within speaking distance, said simply:

"One moment, pard."

"Well, sir?" and Horace Hale drew rein.

"You has been up to ther Elegant Ed mine?"

"I have."

"Does yer intend ter work it?"

"I do."

"Bought it?"

"I expect to purchase it."

"Waal, yer hed better not."

"Why?"

"Yer kin never work it."

"Indeed?"

"Fact."

"Upon what do you base your opinion?"

"Facts."

"Mention a few reasons."

"Fust, ther spirits o' Elegant Ed an' his Angil guards ther mine."

"I do not fear spirits."

"Ag'in, yer'll be kilt ef yer put pick inter ther dirt."

"I'll risk it."

"Better not."

"I am not to be frightened off, my friend."

"I hes warned yer."

"And I refuse to heed your warning."

"Better not."

"But I shall."

"Yer'll tarn up yer toes, boots on, durned soon."

"What interest hold you in the mine?"

"None."

"Then why do you warn me?"

"I don't want ter see yer kilt."

"What am I to you?"

"A human."

"You are gifted with a noble nature if you interest yourself thus in all persons."

"I interests myself in yer, pard, ter tell yer ter let that mine alone."

"Elegant Ed dug out o' it payin' dirt."

"But he hes gone, an' no one else ought ter work it, an' ef yer does, yer'll regret it."

Horace Hale laughed lightly, and then said:

"Where do you live, my friend?"

"In Golden Gulch I did bang out."

"Have you left there?"

"Yes; I skipped out last night."

"Not to return?"

"Not ef I knows myself, and I calkulates I is acquainted."

"Ah! you must have had some trouble then?"

"I hed a bit o' advice given me, an', onlike yerself, I tuk it."

"Indeed?"

"Fact, fer I heeds what are tole me in good part."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you by following your example; but, on the contrary, I shall move up to the cabin to-morrow, and the day following shall begin work in the mine."

"Waal, yer hes narve ter do it, arter what I has told you."

"I thank you my friend, and would be glad if you would live me your name?"

"What fer?"

"That I may rem mber it as one who gave me advice which I refused to follow."

"Waal, as I are still movin' on, I'll give yer my handle."

"It are Danger Dan."

"Ah! you are a man to be feared, from your name?"

"I hain't no sick child, ef it comester music."

"You doubtless are what you look; but tell me, please, if you have seen a strange-looking man in these mountains, during your wandering?"

"I are a strange lookin' crittur myself."

"I'll not contradict you on that point, my friend; but the man I refer to is of a slender, athletic build, not so tall as you or I, by several inches, and is dressed in a dark suit of miner's clothes."

"He has long blonde hair, and a beard that reaches to his waist, while his eyes—"

"Are blue as a bit o' sky between cl'uds?"

"Yes."

"I knows him."

"Who is he?"

"Whar did you see him?"

"Standing by the grave of Edgar Elgin and his wife."

"No."

"Yes, I saw him there."

"Did he draw on you?"

"No."

"You was in luck, fer he are a deadly hand when he draws."

"Who is he?"

"A miner."

"From Golden Gulch?"

"No, he works a lead away over in the upper valley s-mewhere."

"What was he doing there at the grave?"

"Perambulat'n' I guesses."

"Did he know Elgin?"

"Likely."

"And his wife?"

"Jist as likely."

"What did you say was his name?"

"I didn't say."

"But you will tell me?"

"It are hard to tell a man's name in these parts, pard, fer yer see thar are so many pilgrims that is dodgin' ther' desarts under names they never got at baptism."

"Now, likely as not, you is sailin' under a name yer mother never give yer, an', as fer me, I heerd a man call me last night by my handle, when I thought I wasn't know'd, an' it were thet fact, an' also that he advised me to light out thet I lit, and am this far on my journey."

"Then you do not know the man's name?"

"I knows what he are called in ther camps."

"And what is that?"

"Blonde Bill."

"Thank you."

"Now, I'll say good by, but we will meet again."

"Good by, pard; but when yer gits inter trouble up at ther Elgin Mine, from bein' so durned foolhardy, don't say thet Danger Dan didn't warn you."

"No, you shall suffer no blame from that score," and Horace Hale rode on toward Golden Gulch, leaving Danger Dan standing on the side of the trail and gazing after him with a strange look upon his evil face.

CHAPTER XX.

A MAN WITH A HISTORY.

AFTER his return to the Gold Brick, Horace Hale sought Doctor Powell, to whom he had taken a great fancy, and told him of his day's adventures.

"You say the man was standing by the grave of the Elgins?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, and leaning upon the cross, his attitude that of a man in deep grief."

"And also that when you spoke to him he uttered a cry?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand it."

"And more, when I moved toward him he seemed to be horrified, waving me off and again uttering a cry, as of alarm."

"Describe him, please."

Horace Hale did so, and the doctor said slowly:

"There is but one man in these parts that I know of who would answer to that description."

"And his name is—"

"Here, as you know, there is a system of nomenclature that no man can escape, as, for instance, I am called Doc, and the Magic Doctor, while you are already christened as the Kid Glove Miner."

"I know that, and this means that you know the man by his mining-camp appellation only?"

"Yes."

"And what may that be, please?"

"Blonde Bill."

"Ah! the same name which Danger Dan gave me as that of the mysterious personage."

"Danger Dan?"

"Yes."

"Where did you see that man?"

"You recall that I told you I met a miner standing by the trail side, as I came back toward Golden Gulch?"

"Yes."

"Well, that strange personage gave me his name as Danger Dan."

"I know him and only last night drove him out of the Gulch."

"Took?"

"Ha! you were then the person he referred to as having given him some advice which he doubtless: but did the fellow make no attempt to rob you?"

"Not he, for he seemed as peaceable as a lamb."

"He is none too good to have shot you and robbed you, for I know him, and left my mark on him last night!"

"He had one hand tied up, I noticed."

"Yes, I shot a glass out of his hand last night, and aimed so as to wound him slightly."

"Then he it was who gave you the advice not to go to Elgin Mine?"

"Yes."

"And your answer?"

"That I would go up to-morrow."

"That fellow has some motive in that, and, if I mistake not, he and Blonde Bill are pards, or have been, in some devilry, so it will be well to be constantly upon your guard, and, for the first week you are at the mine I will put several scouts on the watch, who are men who will soon run those rascals to earth if they mean mischief."

"Then, doctor, this Blonde Bill is a scamp?"

"I will not assert as much, for I do not know of any act of outlawry he has committed."

"He has a claim up the valley half a dozen leagues from here, and seldom comes to the Gulch."

"In fact, I believe he shuns all of the camps."

"You know nothing of his antecedents?"

"Nothing."

"It seemed to me that I had seen his face before, but it was impossible for me to place him."

"He is a man who has seen better days, that I am certain of, for, though he often speaks in the border dialect, I have heard him on several occasions use good language, which showed he had received an education, while his manners are gentle and his face not wholly bad."

"It was a handsome face?"

"Strangely so; but he is a tiger when aroused, and is sometimes called Tiger Bill, as on one occasion he shot six men in their tracks, when aroused to anger by them, and he planted his bullet in the forehead of each, emptying his weapon in less than nine seconds, and walked off two leagues to his camp, though he had been wounded four times."

"At night he grew worse, and his pards sent for me, and I rode up to his desolate camp, and managed to pull him through; but, while delirious with fever, he kept his teeth shut hard, and excepting one word, uttered nothing to tell who or what he had been."

"And that word?"

"Revenge."

"The man evidently has a history!"

"Without doubt; but what time do you start in the morning?"

"After breakfast, and, by the way, where can I purchase a good horse here, for I shall need two?"

"The major has several good animals in his stable, which you can see in the morning, and, if you have no objection, I will be glad to go up with you to the mine, just for the ride."

"I shall be delighted, doctor."

"Now, how is your patient?"

"Improving rapidly."

"That is good news; but how strange that he should wish to gamble for the ownership of his mine."

"He is a very strange man, Mr. Hale, and the more I see of him, the less I understand him," said Frank Powell in a thoughtful tone.

"Well, I shall play him for the mine until I risk a large sum, and the chances are in my favor to win at least one game."

"He is a born gambler, Mr. Hale, and offered to bet me while I was probing for the bullet, fifty to one that he would recover."

"I shall play him, nevertheless."

"Is the mine worth the risk?"

"I have set my heart upon getting it, and I believe my nature is both persistent and stubborn."

After a short while longer spent in conversation, Horace Hale arose and departed for his own room, while Frank Powell muttered:

"Yes, and he is a man with a history, too, and, if I mistake not, carries a skeleton in his heart."

"Ah me! how many of us in this world are there who do not have a hidden grief!"

"But I like the man, and we will be friends."

CHAPTER XXI.

TEMPEST TOM, THE HUNTER.

TRUE to his resolve, Horace Hale left the Gold Brick the following morning for the mine in the mountain.

He had found a horse to suit him, and the major sold him at a good profit, for Simon Suggs was no man to be worsted in a business transaction.

The Kid Glove Miner paid the price promptly, and then, accompanied by the doctor, went out

to make the necessary purchases of provisions for his use there.

Then, with the rifles, arms and ammunition, which had belonged to Elegant Ed, and been brought by Frank Powell to the hotel, were packed upon the horse, and the two started on their way, for the doctor accompanied the miner.

Before leaving, Horace Hale had sought an interview with William Blackstone, and thanking him for the use of Elgin's weapons, had hoped that he would soon be on his feet once more.

"Oh, I'll be able to pay you for the mine within the month, you can bet on," was the reply.

One thing Frank Powell had done before leaving the hotel to accompany the Kid Glove Miner, and that was to send for several hunters whom he well knew at Golden Gulch, and set them to work to watch the trails leading to the mine, and the mountains near.

"There may be some funny business going on up there, and if you discover any persons playing tricks on the Kid Glove Miner just pounce down upon them and carry them to him, and my word for it, that he will look after them according to their deserts, and not forget you either."

So he said to the hunters, who were men who preferred hunting to mining, had been old Indian fighters, and spent their days in the mountains hunting game, for which they found a ready sale for it in Gold Gulch and the mining camps.

They all liked Frank Powell, and there was not one in the hunter's camp that he had not befriended or served in some way, and the more he selected for the work promised that they would watch the mine most thoroughly.

Up to the lonely cabin the two friends went, for friends they had now become, and no sign of a human being did they see on the way.

The cabin was as it had been left by Horace Hale, and the doors and windows were soon thrown open, allowing the bright sunshine to enter.

Then the provisions were stored away; a fire was built to drive off the dampness, and the two men then went together to the grave.

Frank Powell narrowly examined the surroundings of the grave, looking at every leaf and track with the skill of an Indian, for he is an expert trailer, and then said:

"There has been some one here to-day."

"Indeed? How do you tell?"

"These tracks were made when the dew was on the ground, and they lead toward the mine." And on to the mine they went, and the secret hiding place of the picks and shovels of Elegant Ed were shown to the miner by the doctor, who took up the former and gave one stroke into the yielding earth.

"Hal! that was a lucky find, for see what you have turned up!" cried the miner, and he pointed to the bright yellow particles which the pick had unearthed.

Frank Powell took up piece after piece, and, after examining them closely, said:

"Yes; this is a rich mine, and my idea is that Elegant Ed gave out that his lead was running to bed-rock just to protect himself in his lonely situation."

"But this need not be told to William Blackstone, as my idea is that what he has inherited from poor Elgin he will soon swamp in gambling."

"He must be a lucky gambler, certainly."

"At times he may be; but he has had a run of ill fortune of late, he told me, and will simply gamble on his good luck now, as he calls his fortune from Elgin."

"No; he need not believe the mine more valuable than it is supposed to be, nor need any one else be the wiser; while, as soon as Blackstone is able to play you for it, I will inform you—and may you win, is what I wish for you, Hale."

"Thank you, doctor, and believe me, I deeply appreciate having found in you a friend!" said the miner earnestly.

The two then retraced their way to the cabin, and, mounting his horse, Frank Powell set out upon his return, promising to ride up again in a few days to see the miner.

As he drew near Cedar Canyon, a man suddenly stepped out into the trail before him.

"Ha, Tempest Tom, is that you?"

"It are, Doc."

"I came pretty near letting fly at you."

"No, Doc; your eyes, I know'd, were too quick not to take my photograph at first sight," said the man addressed as Tempest Tom, and who was a hardy son of the mountains, weather beaten by long exposure to the elements, and scarred by many a battle well fought.

He was dressed in buckskin, wore moccasins, and upon his head a squirrel-skin cap, while he was armed with a breech-loading rifle, a knife, and a pair of revolvers.

"Well, Tom, what news?"

"My two pard is off on a trail, Doc, for we has discovered that thar be movin' o' humans about these mountains, an' as thar Elgin mine are thar only one o' consequence hereabout, it must be thar pint of attraction to whoever is scoutin' round."

"True, Tom; and I trust in you to find out who they are, and what they want."

"We'll do it, if it can be did, Doc."

"I know that, Tom, and I'll not forget you for it; as I do not wish harm to fell upon my friend."

"The Kid Glove?"

"Yes."

"He looks queer."

"He is—He want for it."

"What in thar do he war them kid gloves for, Doc?"

"I never asked him, Tom."

"Do he eat in 'em?"

"Yes."

"Pick bones in 'em?"

"No, Tom, he uses a knife and fork."

"Durn a knife an' split spoon anyway, fer they is no good."

"What meat I can chip off a bone with my bowie, I kin chaw off with my teeth, for they holds solid ef I has turned fifty."

"But do he sleep in them gloves, Doc?"

"I have never seen him without them."

"Waal, waal, I haint cur'us, but I w'd like ter ax him jist fer luck, why in thander he do wear 'em."

"N-er mind the gloves, Tom, but look after the man, for you'll find him a noble fellow, my word for it."

"Your word are as good as preachin', Doc, an' I kin lick thar parol as says it haint."

"But I'll tell my pards what yer says, o' kid gloves, an' we'll do our best ter un'arsh any deviltry that are goin' on in these parts."

"I know that you will, Tom; but now let me tell you who have been seen in the mountains."

"Renounce 'em, Doc."

"You know Danger Dan?"

"Does I know Satan?"

"Well, he has been seen here on this trail."

"I heard you had give him a invite out o' thar Gulch."

"I did."

"Waal, he knows yer, Doc, an' he'll accept thar invite."

"But this is not the Gulch, and he may be up to some mischief here."

"True, Doc; now tell me who are t'other power yer had yer mind on."

"You know of Blonde Bill?"

"Ef he haint Satan's sarpint, then a-t me down fer a h-jon."

"Do you know any wrong of him, Tom?"

"Can't say as I does, an' I doesn't know any howin' good of him nuther."

"But he do live so quiet, he do look so gentle, an' he do talk so sweet, that I sets him down fer a suckin' dove with teeth."

"You has a sweet s'ke, too, Doc, an' yer voice are like organ music, an' yer manner are as gentle as a par's, but yer don't run ter woods, but ter good, tho' yer is hell-ter split-thro'-ther-camp-ground when yer is riled."

Frank Powell laughed at the hunter's strange flattery of him, and then said:

"Well, Tom, I leave the mine, the mountain and the Kid Glove Miner in your hands, and in those of your pards."

"We'll take keer o' him, Doc, kid gloves an' all, an' don't yer go ter sleep an' fergit thar fact."

"Ef thar is any liz in these hills o' a oncom-mon natur', we'll be thar ter chip in."

"Good-by, Doc, an' next time I sees yer, I wants ter consult yer about a little mis'ry I has in my head at times."

"It is after a visit to the Gold Brick, isn't it, Tom?"

"O' vari'ly, Doc."

"Next time don't go near Jacques."

"Yer don't think he'd come a pizen game on me, Doc?"

"Oh, no, for Jacques is a good fellow; but if you don't pay him a visit, I a'n't think you will have any misery in your head to complain of the day after."

"Waal, you doubtless knows, Doc?"

"I do, Tom, and I didn't study it out of a medical book either, but learned it from experience."

"Good-by, old fellow," said Frank Powell, rode on, while Tempest Tom muttered:

"Waal, he are a good doctor, an' I'll jist let Jacques shoo next time an' see ef thar mis'ry is in my head proper, or in thar bottle; but I guesses Doc knows how 'tis hisself."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GHOSTS OF THE MINE.

THAT Horace Hale, the Kid Glove Miner, as he was now universally known in and around Golden Gulch, had no dread of the warning of Danger Dan about the mine, was very evident.

Yet he was not so reckless as to disregard wholly what had been said, for he made himself comfortable in the cabin, and at the same time safe.

He carried a rifle secretly to the mine and concealed it there, with a couple of revolvers, while at his cabin he kept other weapons besides those he never went a moment without.

Where he had been mining before coming to Golden Gulch he never said, but he certainly knew well what he was about, and had the ap-

pearance of one who had been accustomed to harder life.

His first day in the cabin was passed in getting things to rights, and by night he had all arranged for his comfort.

As soon as twilight came on he stabled his horse and retired to the cabin, and built a fire to cook his supper.

The logs cast forth a ruddy glow, and the little house looked very cosy, in spite of the tragic scene that had taken place the day before.

After a substantial supper, the Kid Glove Miner took a book from a shelf and tried to read.

But somehow upon his face rested a deep shadow, his eyes merely scanned the words, and throwing his book aside he settled down into a deep reverie.

He was seated in an easy-chair, which Elegant Ed had made for himself, and near it was a smaller one that the poor wife had been wont to sit in.

Upon this one the eyes of the miner fell and rested, and thus he remained for a long time.

Suddenly he started, for there came to him a low moaning sound without.

He did not spring to his feet, but sat in silence, waiting, watching and listening. It seemed like some one moaning outside, as though in distress.

He dared not yet open the door, for he knew that a shot might greet him; so he waited.

At last the moaning sound ceased, and then came the low music of a guitar.

What could it mean?

The fingers seemed to run listlessly over the strings, to judge from the sounds, and the miner shook himself to see if he was awake or dreaming.

No, he was wide awake, yet it seemed like a dream to hear a guitar in that wild region.

Then, at first, softly, plaintively arose a human voice in song.

It was a woman's voice, full, rich, filled with pathetic melody, and it brought the miner to his feet, pale, trembling, and standing as one who had received some great shock.

Within, all was bright and cheery, and the fire was blazing and its glow filling the cabin and falling upon the man who stood there like one dazed.

Without, all was darkness, and the wind was sighing through the pines and making a low accompaniment to the voice that was welling in song.

"Shadows around me are falling,
Longer my feet cannot roam—
Say! are you waiting, my darling—
Waiting to welcome me home?
Waiting the spirit's last bidding,
To fly from this earth and be free.
Over the river my darling,
I am over, just over the tide,
Yes, I am waiting, my darling,
Waiting your footsteps to guide."

So ran the words of the song, and as they ended there broke from the lips of the miner:

"Good God! can such things be! That song, that voice are real! Yes, I am awake! I am not dreaming, and I know not what to say or do."

He sunk down into the chair again and buried his face in his hands.

For a moment there was silence, no sound coming from without, other than the wailing of the wind among the pines, and the long drawn howl of a prowling wolf.

Then again the voice was heard in song.

"When sunset glids the western skies,
And shadows deepen on the sea,
In dreams I sigh for those dark eyes,
Which should have sunk to rest with me.
But they are veiled, my light is gone,
And somber night shades gather fast,
As through the vale I'm borne along,
An Autumn leaf upon the blast.
Yes, they have shone on me the last,
Life's troubled wave to gild no more,
Which now in darkness rusts past,
To break upon an unknown shore."

"Great God! I cannot stand this!" With the words bursting from his lips he sprung to his feet and rushed to the door.

The heavy bar was cast aside, the bolt drawn back, and utterly reckless of consequences, with not even his trusty revolver in his hand, he rushed out into the darkness.

For a moment he was utterly blind coming from the blazing light out into the gloom, and he stood squarely in the glare of the doorway, unmindful that a lurking foe could have met him down.

Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he gazed around him.

The tall pines bowed gracefully under the wind that whistled down the mountain side, and sighed as dismally as though they were human beings.

Leaves here and there skurried across the open space before the cabin, and the howl of the wolf in the glen still continued.

Closing the door behind him, the Kid Glove Miner went slowly toward the grave in its sheltered nook.

It was starlight, and he could see some distance before him.

At last he paused, for he was in sight of the

white cross that marked the resting-place of Elegant Ed and his Angel.

And more he saw than the white cross.

Two forms, clad in white, the one tall, with great broad shoulders, the other slender, stood by the grave.

He knew that it was no fancy, for his eyes did not deceive him.

Still he would make more sure, and he rubbed his eyes to brighten up.

Then he again looked, and the two white forms had gone.

Dashing forward, he soon stood at the grave. All was deathlike silence about him.

In among the cedars he walked, and thoroughly he searched every rock and shrub, yet nowhere were visible the strange apparitions.

With a sigh he turned away, and retraced his way to the cabin.

All seemed as he had left it; but placed just over the mantle was a piece of paper which he knew was not there when he went out.

Quickly he tore it down, and read:

"Be warned! Usurp not the house and the mine of the dead! Seek wealth elsewhere! The one who sung without this cabin to-night wrote these lines."

"Oh, God! What does this mean?" he said, hoarsely, as he threw himself into the chair once more and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

FRANK POWELL was just turning over in bed for his "daylight nap," the sweetest of all sleep, it is said, when he was aroused by a loud knocking at his door.

He had been up until after midnight with William Blackstone, and had left him quietly sleeping, so he did not think the summons could come from him.

He was a man of medicine, however, and it is said that doctors and the wicked know no rest.

"Well, who is it?" he called out.

"It are us, Doc," was the answer.

"Tempest Tom, as I live," and the doctor sprung out of bed, and opened the door.

He admitted Tempest Tom, already known to the reader, and the two hunter pards who had accompanied him to the mountains the day before.

They were men of the same stripe as Tempest Tom, only one was tall and slim, and the other short and thickset.

The former answered to the not inappropriate cognomen of Lanky, and the latter was known by the sobriquet of Duck Leg Dick, which was by no means a misplaced appellation either.

All of the three were pale, and seemed excited, which was rather a coincidence for that plucky trio of hunters.

"Well, pards, what is the matter?" and Doctor Powell saw that the gray dawn was just falling upon Golden Gulch.

"Yer hain't got no benzine convenient ter steady our nerves, hes yer, Doc, fer ther bars hain't open fer pleadin' this yarly in ther mornin', and we does need perscribin' fer almighty bad," insinuated Tempest Tom.

"Oh, you do?"

"Yas, Doc, an' you is our physisb."

"Well, Tom, if you keep on drinkin' as you do, I'll have to have you rectified."

"But won't a few pills do as well as the liquor?"

"Pills be durned! we hain't no apothecary shops, Doc."

"We need stimulents now, and pretty sul-dint, fer we hes ther ter tell yer ther will make yer tackle four fingers yerself."

"Well, Tom, I have a drop I keep on hand for medicinal purposes, and I will give you a swallow."

"I hes got a all-fired swaller, Doc, so I hopes ther bottle hain't been tapped afore."

A bottle of brandy was produced, and the eyes of the trio brightened when they saw that it had not been uncorked.

A glass was procured and filled two-thirds full by each one of the three, Duck Leg Dick, in spite of his sawed-off figure, taking as much as did Lanky and Tempest Tom.

"Now, boys, what has happened?" said the doctor, throwing himself down on his bed once more, while his visitors camped about upon the chairs as though not liking such seats.

"Doc, thar hes been heil ter pay up in the mountings," said Tom.

"Fact, ef not wuss," put in Lanky.

"It are wuss, Doc," remarked Duck Leg Dick.

"Quick! out with it, and tell me if harm has befallen that gallant miner!" and Doctor Powell sprung to a sitting posture.

"Waal, we didn't stay to see."

"Tom, did you run off and desert a man in distress?"

"Doc, are I a man ter skip when thar is any-thing ter fight prowlin' round?"

"I did not think that you were, Tom, but I certainly do not understand what you have done."

"Tell me wnat has happened?"

"Doc, does yer believe in speerits?"

"You believe in spirits certainly, for I believe you are all drunk now."

"Wish ter God we was; but I doesn't mean thet kind o' speerits, Doc."

"What kind do you mean?"

"Spooks, ghosts an' sich!"

"No; I don't believe in any such nonsense."

"Does yer call it nonsense?"

"I do, for there is no such thing as a ghost."

"Bean't they?"

"Waal, thar be."

"Look here, Tom," and stepping to a small closet, Doctor Powell threw the door wide open, an act which brought an exclamation from the three hunters.

Within a strange sight was revealed, for hanging in a row were three skeletons of different sizes, and complete from head to foot.

They hung beneath a shelf, upon which was also a row of skulls, the whole lot grinning dismally into the faces of the three men who sat in silent horror gazing at them.

"Tom, do you see this large skeleton?"

"I does, Doc, fer I hain't blind," answered the hunter, in an awed tone.

"Do you remember the mad miner that ran through the camps shooting the boys right and left, some time after I came here?"

"I does, an' I knows he went fer you, an' yer shot him clean through ther head, when others was a-skootin out o' his way."

"Yas, here is the bullet-hole in his forehead, you see."

"Well this one is Fighting Phil, whom I took care of after he was wounded, and this third one is an Indian warrior that, you may remember, I shot up in the mountains when he was after my scalp."

"These skulls belong to different men, and I have lots of other bones lying about; but these I show you just to convince you that I have no fear of spirits, and, if there were such things, they would likely be hanging around where ther skeletons are."

"Now don't tell me any ghost stories and expect me to believe them."

"Doc, you hain't no fool, and we hain't no idyls; but we hes ter tell yer what we seen, an' ef they wasn't ghosts, then what in thunder was they?"

"Go on with your story, Tom."

"Waal, Doc, yer see, Lanky here planted hisself at ther mine, Duck Leg Dick roosted at ther grave, an' I jist hung on at ther cabing, as soon as it got dark."

"Ef we hed ter retreat we hed agreed ter meet at ther old valley mine thet are deserted."

"Things looked awful serene fer half a hour or so arter night sot in, an' then, ter make it dismal, ther wind begin ter howl among ther pines, and a all-fired wolf got ter tunin' up his voice."

"I seen from a distance ther Kid Glove Miner look arter things, an' then go inter ther cabing, an' I crept up near."

"Waal, soon arter I heered a moan comin' from round in front, for I were back in ther rear, ag'in' ther mount'in."

"Then I heerd music."

"Music, Tom?"

"Yas, Doc!"

"The miner was singing, or perhaps playing upon a guitar, which was in the cabin and belonged to El's poor Angel!"

"Nary, ther Kid Gloves were doin' nothin' o' ther kind, Doc."

"Then from whence came the music?"

"It were a gitter."

"A guitar?"

"Yas."

"I told you so."

"But ther Gloves wasn't playin' it."

"Who was then?"

"Ther ghost!"

"Curse your ghost, Tom."

"I don't say so, Doc; but it were a ghost, an' sure she begun to sing."

"Oh! it was a female ghost?"

"Yas, she were a shemalé ghost, an' she were drest in white."

"You saw her then?"

"Now I did, Doc, an' I are sorry thet I did."

"Go on, Tom, with the story."

"Waal, she begun to sing, Doc, an' oh, Lordy! but she did sing sweet."

"I hes heerd o' angil's voices, an' she hes got one."

"It jist made my heart beat, an' I hain't ever heerd a bird thet c'd sing with her, tho' I hes listened to ther sweeties' chirpin' in ther woods."

"She sunged one song, an' then give us a rest."

"I wish you'd give us a rest, Tom, with your ghost story, and come to facts."

"Them is facts, Doc, good as sworn to, an' no mistake."

"Arter she hed-singed one song she let up a while, an' then soon arter beganed ag'in on another tune."

"You are confident it was another tune, Tom?"

"I c'd sw'ar to it."

"What were the words?"

"I disremembers adactly, but they was all about shadders fallin' round, an' waitin' fer a

darlin', an' spirits flyin' from yarth, an' bein' over ther tide."

"Oh! it was a serenade."

"I guesses so, Doc."

"A ghostly one; but was that all the ghost sung?"

"No, Doc, fer she singed a second time about eyes bein' veiled, lights gone out, leafs being blown along ther vale, an' breakin' upon an unknown shore."

"Oh! it were ghostly music, Doc."

"I don't doubt it, Tom, and rather hard on the lady ghost that she should go broke on an unknown shore."

"Yer is joking, Doc, but I finds it a subject fer weepin'."

"Try that bottle again, Tom, to keep your tears from drownin' you."

"Thankee, Doc, these is ther spirits I loves."

"Doubtless," and that his pards were of the same mind was evident, for the six drinks emptied the brandy bottle.

"What was the Kid Glove Miner doing all this time, Tom?"

"He were list'nin' inside, while I were creepin' up ter see who it were a-singing."

"I got near, an' I seen two ghosts, speerits or spooks, ther Lord knows which, an' they was standin' near the cabing corner nighest the grave."

"I didn't say nothin', fer I c'dn't, and presently they jist floated away, an' I arter them, jist as ther door opened an' out come ther miner."

"But I was a-trallin' ther spooks an' I didn't stop, until I seen them come nigh ther grave."

"Then I seen Duck Leg Dick here suddintly light out down ther mountain side, as tho' ther Devil hed sent fer him, an' I follered, while ther ghosts went on ter go back ter ther roost in ther grave, as I suspected."

"Waal, I are some on a run, an' Duck Leg Dick hain't considered rapid; but durned ef he didn't beat me ter ther Valley mine."

"But, Doc, we hedn't more then looked at one another, when we heerd suthin' a-comin'."

"We know'd it wasn't no ghosts, fer itsounded like six grizzlys tearin' through ther brush."

"But suddint, jist as we was ready ter fight, thar comed Lanky, steppin' twenty feet at a jump, an' ef he hedn't 'a' seen us, he'd hev been a runnin' yit."

"What are it, pard?"

"So I shouted at him, an' he tried ter stop, but it wasn't so durned easy, he were a-goin' so, an' he got past ther mine afore he brung up."

"Then says he, he says:

"Pards, is thet you?"

"We said as how it were us, an' he says, says he:

"Pards, I hes seen two ghosts."

"We didn't argue with him, fer we hed seen likewise; but we talked over ther matter, an' arter a while we come ter ther conclusion we'd better light out fer Golden Gulch."

"We were thet weak in ther legs, however, from our skeer, thet we had ter go slow an' rest often."

"But here we is, Doc, an' yer hes ther Bible facts o' ther case."

"This is indeed a strange story you tell, pards; but to-night we will go back and—"

"Who'll go back?" asked the trio in chorus.

"We will."

"Who is we, Doc?"

"I will go with you."

"Doc, you kin go, fer yer likes dead folks' bones even; but we won't go."

"Ef yer wants us ter tackle grizzlys, here we is."

"Ef yer says fight Injuns, we is thar."

"Ef yer says fill up with tanglefoot an' parade through ther camps on a rampage, we'll do it; but, Doc, much as we loves yer, we'll see yer eternally durned afore we goes back thar."

"Nonsense."

"No it hain't nonsense, Doc."

"We hes chinned this biz all over a-comin' down, an' we is decided thet we hain't no ghost-hunters."

"Very well, I will go myself; but say nothing of this to no one."

"We hain't a-goin' ter, fer we wants ter fergit it, Doc."

"Only you is a cussed fool then I tuk yer fer, ef yer goes prowlin' up thar."

"I shall go at any rate, and I will start after breakfast, to see what has become of the Kid Glove Miner."

"Now go down and get an appetizer from Jacques, and tell the major to give you your breakfast."

"We'll do it, fer we is as empty as a ghost," said Tempest Tom, as he led the way down stairs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE STORY.

TRUE to his word, as soon as Frank Powell got his breakfast, he rode off alone toward the Elgin Mine.

It was a lovely day, and the bright sunshine dispelled even the shadows in the mountain fastnesses, and the doctor wondered, as he rode along, how men could be so foolish and superstitious as to believe in the supernatural.

He knew the trio, Tempest Tom, Lanky, and Duck Leg Dick well.

He had seen them in the direst danger, cool and fearless.

But he could not understand why they had run off from the mine, and said that they had seen ghosts.

They were always reliable in all their reports, and when he had seen Tom on the mountain side he had been sober, and the three were certainly, to use their own expression of facts, "painfully sober," when they had first come to his room that morning.

It was not night-time, but daylight, and in its glare, Tempest Tom had told his story and Lanky and Duck Leg Dick had vouched for it. Apart, not together, they had seen the alleged ghosts, and there certainly was some strange mystery in it.

The Kid Glove Miner, Tempest Tom had said, had come out of his cabin to face whatever was outside.

That was just as Powell had expected he would do.

But what had been the result?

He feared some harm had befallen his new-found friend, and he urged his horse on to a swift gallop, whenever the trail would admit of speed.

Passing Cedar Canyon he paused a moment and glanced about him.

All was quiet then, excepting the singing of the birds. Pushing on, he soon came in sight of the cabin, and saw that the door was locked.

Dismounting, he discovered that it had been locked from without, for the key was out of the door, and the padlock and chain in its place.

This showed that the Kid Glove Miner was not with him.

Going to the stable he found that his horses were not there, but the saddle and pack-saddle, with the bridles, hung on their pegs.

A short search discovered, the horses staked out in a little grass-covered vale near by.

Then calling to his horse to follow him, Frank Powell walked slowly along toward the grave.

He came to it and halted. Nothing but perfect rest was there, but the wild flowers upon the mound seemed bruised, as though from a heavy weight falling or resting upon them.

Then the doctor recalled what the Kid Glove Miner had told him of the blonde-haired and bearded man who had fallen there in a seeming faint.

Passing on, Frank Powell soon came in sight of the mine.

The trail showed fresh tracks, and these the doctor kept his eyes upon.

Drawing near the mine he halted, and bade his horse await him.

The obedient animal stood perfectly still, and, not knowing what awaited him, Dr. Powell drew a revolver and stepped quickly up to the entrance to the mine, which was a cavernous opening in the side of a cliff.

"Halt or die!"

The voice rung deep and stern out of the mine, but the moment after, in fact, the second following, came the words:

"Ha! Powell, it is you."

"I saw your shadow and knew not who to expect as a visitor."

Then out of the mine stepped the Kid Glove Miner.

Frank Powell saw at a glance that his face was pale.

But he was in working costume, yet still had his kid gloves on.

He grasped the miner's hand and said, lightly: "It was such a pleasant day, I thought I would run up to see you."

"I am glad you came, for I wish to show you that I am striking it rich."

"See, as I dig into yonder bank the dirt pays well, for it is filled with little particles of metal which I can easily sift out."

"Am glad that you are pleased with your mine."

"I am greatly so, and would give Blackstone ten thousand for it to-day."

"Do not do it, for all that he gets he will gamble away."

"Play him for the mine until you win it, as you propose, and then, if it pans out rich, it is easy enough to give him a bonus at some future time; but, do you know, I think you ought to have help here with you?"

"Why?"

"It will become noised abroad about the rich find you have, and there are plenty of wild fellows who will club together and make a raid on you."

"In fact, Bender and his gang are none too good for it."

"I do not fear them, for I shall be ever on my guard."

"How did you find your cabin last night?"

"Comfortable, I hope?"

"Oh yes, there is no more comfortable cabin in these parts, I guess."

"You were not disturbed, were you?"

"What was there to disturb me, Powell?" and the doctor noticed the look of intense sadness that crept over the face of the Kid Glove Miner as he asked the question.

"Oh! I didn't know but that you might have had some visitors prowling around."

"Why, who could they be?"

The doctor laughed lightly, and set down Tempest Tom and his pards in his mind as gigantic liars, while he answered:

"I have been told that the mine was haunted."

Instantly the face of the miner changed, and laying his hand heavily upon the shoulder of the doctor, he said in a husky voice:

"You have been told this?"

"Yes."

"That the mine is haunted?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"A male and female ghost, supposed to be poor Elgin and his wife."

"When were you told this?"

"This morning, early."

"By whom?"

"I will confess to you, Hale."

"The fact is, I felt a little anxious about you coming here alone after you told me of having seen Danger Dan and Blonde Bill in the mountains, and so I got three old friends of mine, scouts, trailers and hunters, and sent them here to keep watch."

"Go on, please."

"They came, one of them taking up his post near your cabin, another at the grave, and the third here at the mine."

"Where are they now?"

"In Golden Gulch."

"Were they here last night?"

"Yes."

"When did they leave?"

"Early in the night, I judge."

"Pray proceed, Powell."

"Old Tempest Tom, the one stationed near the cabin, with his two pards came to my room at daybreak, and aroused me with a strange story."

"And that story, please?"

"Was to the effect that Tempest Tom had heard music—"

"Hail he heard it then?" quickly said the Kid Glove Miner.

"Yes, he heard the music of a guitar, accompanying a voice in singing—"

"A woman's voice?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"He heard her sing two songs, and creeping nearer he saw two forms, one large, the other small, standing near your cabin."

"Hail were they clad in white?"

"So he says, and as they glided away he followed them in the darkness."

"He had not gotten far off before you opened the door and sprung out of the cabin."

"That is true."

"Then he beheld the two alleged ghosts standing by the grave of Elegant Ed and his Angel, and saw Duck Leg Dick, his pard on watch there, bound away down the mountain side."

"He fled too, and they met at a rendezvous, an old deserted mine in the valley, and soon after there dashed up Lanky—"

"Who is Lanky?"

"The third of the trio, and the one that was stationed at this mine."

"Well?"

"They all had seen the ghosts, as they called them, and Lanky asserts that their coming ran him away from the mine, for he recognized them as being the spirits of Elegant Ed and his Angel."

"Powell, this is remarkable, and now I know that it was not a dream, a hallucination of my fevered brain, as I had coaxed myself to believe."

"And you saw these alleged ghosts too?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"The music startled me, and listening, I heard the voice of one I had met before."

"It sung a song familiar to me years ago."

"Then came a silence, and again a song, also familiar, and sung in the same full, rich, pathetic voice."

"I dashed out of the door, half wild at the strange circumstance, but I found all darkness and silence."

"Straight to the grave I went, as soon as I could collect myself, and there I beheld the two ghostly forms."

"I moved forward and they disappeared, and search for them proved unavailing."

"I came to the mine and then returned to my cabin, and there I found, above the mantle, this paper of warning."

He took the paper from his pocket and handed it to Doctor Powell as he spoke.

The doctor read it with surprise, and then said:

"It is a woman's hand, and boldly and beautifully written."

"Yes."

"Who can have written it?"

"I recognized the writing at a glance."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"Then you know the writer?"

"I knew her."

"Knew her?"

"Yes."

"Where is she now?"

"Dead."

In spite of his iron nerve Frank Powell started.

What to say he knew not, and the two stood in silence for full a moment.

Then the doctor asked:

"What do you make out of all this, Hale?"

"I made it a dream, a hallucination, for, until your coming, I had forgotten this paper."

"Now, with what you say these three men saw, and with this paper in my hand, I know not what to make of it."

"I am no superstitious idiot, and yet I am considerably shaken up."

"You are cool-headed Powell, and in your professional duties have had to cut the human form to fragments, and know well that the soul cannot roam the earth."

"But tell me, does this shake your faith?"

"Not in the least."

"You do not believe that I saw those forms?"

"Oh yes, but I do not believe they were ghostly."

"Ah, you think it was some one masquerading?"

"Yes."

"But the voice?"

"The voice you are sure was a woman's?"

"Yes."

"And you recognized it as one you have heard before?"

"I did."

"Where is the one whose voice you recognized last night?"

"In her grave."

"And was the voice that of the same person whose writing is there?"

"It was."

"This is strange."

"It is indeed, for, if they were masquerading, what purpose could they have?"

"To frighten you away from this mine."

"Why?"

"Because they know its value."

"That would be plausible if it was not for the voice and hand-writing."

"Your ears might have imagined a similarity in the voice."

"Can my eyes be deceived too as regards the writing?"

"They might be."

"See here, my practical friend, and tell me if this writing was not done by the same hand that wrote that warning?"

He took from his pocket as he spoke a time-worn letter, and thrust it before the eyes of Doctor Powell.

Attentively he gazed upon it an instant, and then at the warning, and said slowly:

"Yes, I would swear that the two were written by one and the same person."

"And so would I, while that same person always played the guitar, in preference to any other instrument, and it was such an instrument that I heard last night."

"I tell you, Powell, there is some deep, unfathomable mystery in all this."

"Deep I admit, but not unfathomable, Hale."

"What mean you?"

"I mean that I will come up here to-night and watch with you, and I'll test my aim on the ghosts."

"If they get away after I fire, then I'll believe in ghosts until Doomsday."

"Not for the world, Powell, would I have you do that."

"If it is a supernatural being, then it is the ghost, shadow, spirit, or whatever you will, of the one I recall as the writer of these lines, and never would I allow a shot fired."

"No, I will remain here alone, although I thank you most warmly."

"If in my power I will solve the mystery; but believe me, I am not one to be driven off a trail whenever I set out to follow it to the end."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Hale."

"But you had better let me send you some bold fellow as a companion."

"No, indeed; I prefer to remain alone."

"As you please; but, for God's sake, be cautious, for I cannot get rid of the idea that the ghosts are flesh and bone, and, if cornered, could prove very dangerous."

"If ghosts, and assured of that fact, I would not fear an army of them; but if mortal, I tread lightly and go slow."

"I will be cautious."

"Now tell me how Blackstone is?"

"Rallying wonderfully."

"He will be out within two weeks."

"Good, and the sooner the better, for I wish to know whether I am to own this mine or not."

"I'll wager you win it; but now I must be off," and soon after Frank Powell mounted his horse and rode slowly back toward Golden Gulch, certainly impressed by all he had heard, in spite of his skepticism.

CHAPTER XXV.

WEIRD RUMORS AFLOAT.

WHEN Frank Powell returned to the Gold Brick, after his round of professional visits to the mining camp, to see the lame, the halt, the

blind, and the wounded, of which latter there was always a goodly share in Golden Gulch, he found Tempest Tom and his two pards wholly overcome by the spirits.

The spirits in the mountains had started them, and the spirits in Jacques's bar had kept them going, until they had told the story of their night's adventure a hundred times, and been treated for every time.

Seeing that some excitement was abroad, Frank Powell entered the spiritual precinct of the hotel, to discover his trio of worthies surrounded by an eager crowd, listening to the oft-repeated tale.

At sight of the doctor their consciences smote them with the remembrance that they were pledged to keep dark upon the subject.

But, seeing that they had told the story, Frank Powell walked up to them, and said:

"Tom, I have just come from the Elgin mine."

"Lordy, did yer see ther ghosts, pard?"

"No."

"Didn't see ther sperits?"

"No; but you have, that is certain."

"They didn't prowl by day, maybe?"

"They prowl pretty lively here by day, I take notice," answered the doctor, with a smile.

"Waal, we seen 'em."

"Yes, and if you keep on drinking as you do, you'll see snakes, monkeys, hobgoblins, and all other terrible things to-night."

"I hain't goin' ter bed."

"You'll get into a snug little bed, a woollen overcoat, if you don't stop drinking."

"You knows, Doc, fer yer is durnation on medicine; but, did yer go ter ther mount'ins?"

"I did."

"Did yer see Kid Gloves?"

"I did."

"Ther ghosts didn't run off with him, then, Doc?"

"No."

"Yer axed him?"

"What?"

"Ef he seen 'em?"

"Yes."

"An' what did he say?" eagerly asked a number of voices.

"He saw the ghosts."

"No!"

"So he told me."

"Waal, waal."

"An' you believes him?"

"Yes, Tom."

"See what it be ter be eddicated."

"Now, ef a ignorant galoot sich as I be sw'ars ter seein' ghosts, then he are sot down as a ex-cruciatin' liar; but ef a feller hes been ter school an' got his grip on books, then when he sees a ghost, it are believed."

"Tom, the Kid Glove Miner gave me proof that he had seen the ghosts."

"Didn't we give yer proof, Doc?"

"No, for you skipped off, while he remained, and with the result that he saw the ghosts disappear, perhaps in chase of you, while, upon returning to his cabin, he found a ghostly warning to quit the mine, as the spirits will not allow him to work."

"An' he quit?"

"No, he still remains there."

"Waal, he hev more narve than one man oughter hev, that are sartin."

"I doesn't fear mortal humans, but I does take a back seat, an' a long way back, when sperits is prowlin'," said Tempest Tom.

"An' I don't crowd ther mourners on sich occasi'ns," added Lanky, while Duck Leg Dick remarked:

"I hain't likely ter stay, ef I kin git, when grave-yard folks git ter carousin' round."

These seemed to be the views of the masses, and Frank Powell, for reasons of his own, now that the ghost-frightened trio had given out the secret, seemed to wish to encourage the idea that the spirits seen were real phantoms from the Shadow Land.

"I know that it are Elegant Ed an' his Angel, who don't want nobody workin' ther mine arter they was kilt as they was," said one.

"They was a man-ghost, an' a woman-ghost, that war sartin, fer I both seen 'em, an' didn't I hear ther shemale a-singin' that sweet thet a old wolf quit howlin'?" said Tempest Tom.

Having added what fuel he could to the ghostly flame, Frank Powell left the bar and went up to see his patient.

He found William Blackstone greatly improved, yet the wounded man asked:

"What is all this nonsense, Powell, about ghosts seen up at my mine?"

"Where did you hear anything about it?" asked Frank Powell.

"Oh! from that Chinese circulating medium, Plug Chew."

"Curse him!" muttered Powell between his teeth.

"He heard some old hunters saying down-stairs that they were up in the mountains last night, and were run off from the mine's vicinity by seeing two ghosts."

"Yes; there is a rumor to that effect."

"It is all nonsense, of course."

"It seems not."

"Bah! you don't mean to say that you believe in such trash?"

"What I believe is one thing, Mr. Blackstone, and what they believe is another."

"They told me that they had seen ghosts there, and I rode up to see the Kid Glove Miner this morning."

"Well?"

"He corroborates them, though he knew not of the hunters' presence in the mountains."

Frank Powell was watching his patient closely, and he saw him turn a shade paler; but he said:

"Does such a man as Hale say he saw ghosts?"

"He saw two forms clad in white, one appearing to be a man, the other a woman, and he heard the voice of the latter in song, accompanied by a guitar."

"He saw them go to the grave of poor Ed Elgin and his wife, and there disappear."

"Returning to his cabin he found a warning, written, he says, in the handwriting of a woman now dead, and bidding him leave the mine."

"The voice in song also, he says, was the same as that of the one who wrote the warning."

"Of course he does not wish the mine now?"

"He says he will remain, for the ghostly visitants, he does not fear."

"Egad! he may have the mine now cheap; for I guess it will be unvaluable property, and I'd never work it."

"No; he still wishes to play you for it, as soon as you are able."

"All right; as he pleases."

"The interest of gambling for it will not let me allow it to go without a struggle."

"But I don't like this story."

"It will be detrimental to the mine."

"It is not that, doctor."

"What then?"

"Why, I don't like to feel that the dead come back to earth," and William Blackstone, shuddered as he spoke.

"There are many who believe that they do. But I believe Hale will solve the mystery," quietly answered Frank Powell, as he finished dressing the wound of his patient, whom he saw was considerably exercised by what he had heard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MINER'S GRIT.

THAT the Kid Glove Miner was disturbed by what had transpired the previous night, there was no doubt.

A feeling of loneliness came over him as he saw Frank Powell ride away; but shaking it off he set to work with his pick, and no man could have been insensible to the good luck which every stroke was showering upon him.

The bank through which the vein ran, seemed as though in ages past it might have been the bed of a stream, for small pieces, nuggets and little globes of gold were being constantly unearthed by the miner, and he forgot all else in his rapidly increasing good fortune.

At last the shadows creeping into the mine warned him that night was coming on, and hiding his tools, and gathering up his little bag of gold, he wandered homeward.

At the grave of Ed Elgin and his Angel, he paused a moment in respectful silence, and then went on to his cabin.

His horses were brought in, watered and locked up in the stable, and then he built a bright fire, to shed a cheerful glow through the cabin.

For supper he seemed to have no appetite, and was content with a cup of coffee.

Then he settled himself down in his easy-chair to wait.

But no sound came to him, as before, of the thrumming guitar and voice in song.

At last he dropped off to sleep and when he awoke the fire had burned low.

Then he retired to rest, dressed as he was, and with his belt of arms at hand.

But the sun arose and he awoke, having neither seen or heard ought of his spectral visitors of the night before.

Opening his door he started, for there, upon the side of his cabin was stuck a piece of paper.

Upon it, written in the same handwriting as was the other he read aloud:

"Heed my warning! Leave this mine forever!"

"Let no human being come near the dread spot!"

He could not understand it, and yet he would not heed it, and set to work preparing his breakfast.

All day long he worked in his mine, and with increasing good luck, and again night found him alone in his cabin.

But again no visitants from the shadow-land were seen or heard, and, with the coming day he once more stepped out of the door to find, as he had half suspected, the placard of warning upon his door.

This read:

"For God's sake heed this warning!"

He placed it with the others, and once more went to his work.

There, several hours after, Frank Powell found him.

"I am glad to see you, Powell, he said.

"I wanted to come up yesterday, Hale, but could not as I was too busy, and I could not find a man who would come for me."

"They know then of my ghostly visitors?" said the miner with a sad smile.

"Yes; the e three worthies got drunk and gave it all away, and for love or money no man in Golden Gulch, unless it is Faro Fred, would come here alone."

"It is better so, for I do not care to have them, for, as you see, I am in luck."

"You are, indeed!" and Frank Powell glanced at the little pile of precious metal at his feet.

"It improves each day."

"And now about the ghosts?"

"Come up to the cabin, and we will talk it over," and the two left the mine.

When there, the miner showed the two warnings, and Frank Powell asked:

"Where did you find these?"

"One upon the side of the cabin, and the other upon the door."

"And how were they fastened?"

"I neglected to notice—yes, this one was just over the fire-place, by a peg as you see, and now we will look outside."

"That one was hung upon that nail, and—By Heaven! this one was stuck on the door by sealing-wax, for see there, Powell!"

He pointed to a red spot on the door, which was a lump of sealing-wax.

"It has a stamp upon it, Hale," said Frank Powell.

The miner grasped it, and, as his eyes fell upon it, he turned very pale.

"What alarms you, my friend?" asked Frank Powell in his kindly way.

"Doctor Powell, this seal is the crest of the family to which the writer of those warnings belonged. See, there is the Latin motto of her name."

"*Nil desperandum!*" said the doctor, reading it aloud.

"Ay, and I'll never despair of solving this ghostly secret!" almost fiercely said Horace Hale.

"I must say that I admire your nerve and your staying qualities," remarked Frank Powell, charmed with the grit of the Kid Glove Miner.

"Oh, I shall stay, doctor; and some day when you come up here I may have a solution to the mystery."

"I must confess that this last act of the ghosts seems wonderful—the seal, I mean."

"It does, indeed!"

But though the two men talked over the affair for several hours, they could arrive at no estimate of the truth of the affair, and Frank Powell again took his leave. That night, as Horace Hale sat before his fire listening to the dismal patter of the rain upon the roof and the howling wind without, for a storm was rushing through the mountains, he sprung to his feet as suddenly there was heard a wild and piercing shriek.

Hastily he sprung to the door, and as he threw it open and glanced outside, there came floating to his ears, borne upon the angry wind, two voices in song.

The sound came from the direction of the lonely grave, and the voices were those of a man and a woman, and the air was a quaint old melody, long known to the miner.

As it died away he returned to his cabin, a sad, yet grim look upon his stern, handsome face, and once again sought rest.

The following morning there was no placard upon the cabin, the shriek and the singing having seemingly been warning enough, and once more the miner went to his work, and toiled through it the livelong day.

Worn out he sought rest at an early hour, and never awakened until he heard a voice hailing without.

It was broad daylight, and the voice he knew as that of the doctor.

"Ay, ay, Powell," he answered, and he flung open the door.

There stood the doctor by the side of his horse, and he said:

"I was called to the Wild Cat Camp last night, and as it was but a league from here, I rode on to see you."

"Glad to see you, doctor, so come in and we will soon have breakfast."

"First take this placard, which I took from your door."

"You see it has the same seal on the wax as the other?" and he handed over a paper he held in his hand.

"Yes," and the Kid Glove Miner's face whitened as he read it.

"What! some mystery?"

"Yes, for this warning calls me by my name."

"That every one knows whereabouts, if they have not forgotten it in calling you the Kid Glove Miner."

"No, my name, I will tell you in confidence, is *Horace Hale Hammond*."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and the full name is written here."

"That is strange indeed."
 "Yet I shall solve the mystery, doctor."
 "And I glory in your spurk; but what was on the tapis the night before?"
 The miner told of the shriek and the duet, and Frank Powell shook his head, and asked:
 "Well, does your gold luck continue?"
 "Better and better."
 "Good!"
 "And Blackstone?"
 "Is improving rapidly."
 "Has he heard of the troubles here?"
 "Oh, yes, for that infernal Chinese told him; but I think he is the more anxious to sell, as he is not, in my opinion, a man who likes ghosts."
 "Powell, I do not believe that you like Mr. Blackstone."
 "To be honest, I do not, for he does not seem to be a square man to me, and I hate a fraud."
 "Don't tread on my toes, for I hold back part of my name," said the miner, with a smile.

"Nor do I, for no matter what reason you may have for so doing, I will frankly tell you that I believe you honest to the core."

"Thank you, Powell; but now to get breakfast," and half an hour after the two men ate the meal with a relish that was enjoyable, and while the doctor returned to his professional duties among the camps, the Kid Glove Miner went back to his work in the mine.

Thus the days passed, and many warnings of various kinds were nightly given, yet remained unheeded, while the denizens of Golden Gulch began to dread the very mountains in which the Elgin mine was situated, and Frank Powell, all in his power, added to their holy horror by setting stories afloat, which went the rounds of the camps like wildfire, for he had but to hint to Plug Chew anything he had found out about the ghost to have it spread through the domestic circle of the hotel ten minutes after, with all the additions that a repeated story will have added to it.

From the kitchen to the office, from the office to the bar, and thus out upon the streets, it went, until the citizens of Golden Gulch remained much more indoors at night than had been their wont.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEATH-SHOT.

As time wore on, so callous did the Kid Glove Miner become regarding the ghostly visitants and their warnings that he failed to notice them, and got so that he could retire to his bed and sleep soundly after his hard day's work in his mine.

Having arrived at this desirable state of affairs, he determined to make some effort to solve the mystery.

To do so, he arranged for the attempt by day.

A bottom log of his cabin, in the rear, was sawed in two in two places, wide enough apart to admit of his passing through the opening when the piece was taken away.

As some bushes grew against the rear of the house just at this point, the opening would not be visible to any one passing, should any one do so.

Then, when darkness came on, the miner built his fire, locked up his horses, and went into his cabin.

He prepared his supper, but, full of his intended adventure, ate sparingly, and allowed the fire to die out.

Then, when all was dark, he crept to the log, drew it inside, and noiselessly crept through the opening.

The night was starlight, yet dark, especially there in the shadow of the mountains, and he crept to the corner of the cabin and waited.

But, fearing that an experienced eye might detect him, even in the gloom, he went back to the shelter of the bushes in the rear of the cabin, and made his way by a circuit, to the mountain side in front of his little house.

The cabin stood upon a terrace of the mountain, as it were, for a ridge arose high behind it, while in the front the hill sloped precipitately to the valley far below.

But there was an acre of fairly level space about the little abode, and the miner, by gaining a point in front of the cabin, and creeping up to the edge of the hill, knew that he could command a view of what might take place within a hundred feet of him.

For a long time he waited and yet no form was visible moving near him.

Then he heard the hoot of an owl not far away, and it was answered from down toward the grave in the nook.

Instead of the owl near him again hooting, the one in the distance did so, and again and again repeated the dismal sound.

This seemed to put the miner on the *qui vive*, and he cautiously made his way in the direction of the grave.

Keeping under the ridge of the hill, and along its side he had to necessarily travel slowly, so that it took him quite a long time to reach the spot he desired, and which he knew would command a view of the little glen and the white cross that marked the grave of Ed Elgin and his Angel.

Before he reached the desired spot, he heard

the hoot of the owl, coming as though from the very grave.

But, when he arrived where he could see the cross, grim and white through the darkness, the owl was silent.

But for awhile only, and then came the hoot, as though from the mine.

And, on to the mine the ghost-hunter made his way, until he at last stood under the cliff.

But all was silent there. Entering the dismal looking hole he felt around it, and finding nothing, as he seemed to have half expected to do, he came out once more into the air.

Then he walked slowly along the trail, and halted when he came to the grave.

The hoot of the owl had ceased, and all was silent about the desolate and sacred spot.

Going from the grave to the hillside, he made his way cautiously once more back to the cabin, or rather to his position in front of it.

He had not been there a moment, before he saw a dark form glide up the trail.

Halting, the intruder looked about him, and then moved forward once more.

His steps were bent for the cabin, but he approached with great caution.

It was very evident to the Kid Glove Miner that there was nothing ghostly about that tall, large form.

Arriving at the cabin door the man halted, and, bending over, seemed to listen.

Then he again rose to an upright position, and was moving slowly away in the direction of the grave, when the Kid Glove Miner sprang over the ridge of the hill and cried, sternly:

"Stand, or you are a dead man!"

The intruder started, turned, and quick as a flash came the report of a pistol, as he threw forward his weapon.

At the same instant the miner pulled trigger, for he had not expected a shot from his foe, and the man fell to the ground with a heavy thud.

Quickly he sprang to the side of the fallen man and laid his hand upon his head.

"Yes, it was a death shot, for I feel my bullet-hole in his forehead."

"But I am wounded, too, and I will seek Powell's services as quickly as possible, and carry my game with me."

Five minutes after the Kid Glove Miner was riding down the mountain trail, and upon the horse he was leading behind him hung the limp body of the man whom his death-shot had slain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MINER'S BIG GAME.

The sun was just rising when the Kid Glove Miner struck the first camp of Golden Gulch, and the sleepy denizens, glancing at the horse-man, looked on with amazement as they saw who it was, and that he had bagged some human game.

"Thar'll be music up at ther Gold Brick, pard, and I goes," cried a burly miner, and this seemed to be the general sentiment, for when Horace Hale arrived at the hotel he had a following of half a hundred men.

He had been recognized as the Kid Glove Miner, and the Ghost Hunter, and, seeing that he had come into Golden Gulch, the citizens were bound to know all that he could tell about the mysteries up in the mountains.

This desire was by no means lessened by the fact that he carried "big game" in his pack-saddle, as some one called the corpse upon the led horse.

Arriving at the Gold Brick, the Kid Glove Miner raised the heavy body in his arms and bore it into the hallway with an ease that displayed marvelous strength.

"Give me a room quick!" he asked the clerk, and one was hastily assigned to him.

Thither he bore the body, and then, locking the door, sought the room of Dr. Powell, the crowd gazing after him in muttering wonder, and, in their disappointment, betaking themselves to the delightful haunt of Jacques, whose assistants were at once set to work with a will quenching the thirst of the early risers.

Again was the doctor aroused from his "waking up nap" by a knock at his door, and upon opening it he cried out in glad surprise:

"Hale! by the Rockies! but I am glad to see you!"

"But you look pale."

"I am bleeding from a slight wound in my arm, which I came to ask you to dress for me."

"By all means."

"Throw off your things and let me have a look at it."

Without asking how it was received, the doctor set to work, and soon discovered a bullet-wound just below the shoulder.

"I hope it has not hurt the bone," he said.

"It was checked by the bone, I think, for I felt the shock, though the charge seemed very light, or it would have gone through."

"We will soon see," and Doctor Powell ran his probe into the wound, the miner not flinching.

"Now we have it," and a moment after the bullet was taken out.

"The charge was light, as you say, Hale, for you will see that the bullet was not flattened by striking the bone, and the wound will rapidly heal."

Dressing it quickly, the arm was then hung in a sling, and the miner said:

"Now, Powell, I suppose you would like to know how I got shot?"

"I confess to some little curiosity on that score," answered Frank Powell, with one of his genial smiles.

"Well, finish dressing and go down with me to room number two, where I have what some miner, as I came along, called big game."

"Ah! you killed him, then?"

"The man who shot me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, yes, and I think you will recognize him; but while you are dressing I will tell you all."

The Kid Glove Miner then related the facts known to the reader, and, as they were about to leave the room, Frank Powell said:

"Pardon me, Hale, but I notice that your gloves are all soiled with blood, and if you object to going bare-handed I will let you have a pair of mine."

The miner's face flushed, but he said quietly: "Thank you, Powell, but I have others, and these are in bad shape, I admit."

He walked to the window as he spoke, drew from an inner pocket of his mining-shirt a new pair of gloves, and began to draw off the soiled one from the left hand.

In this arm he had been wounded; but he soon drew on the clean glove, and then the right-hand followed, Frank Powell the while cleaning up his surgical instruments, and taking no notice of him apparently.

"Pardon my detaining you, but I am ready now," said the Kid Glove Miner, and the two descended to the lower floor, where they came in for most critical observation.

It was observed at once that the miner wore his arm in a sling, and also that he had on a pair of new kid gloves.

But the crowd had little time for observation, as the miner led the way to the room in which he had left the corpse.

Opening the door, he called to Major Suggs to enter with them, and the three walked into the room.

"Danger Dan!"

The name came from the lips of both the doctor and the major simultaneously.

"Yes, he is the same one I met in the mountains, and who gave me the warning about the mine," said the miner.

"He has met a just fate, and I will tell you who he is."

"See here!"

The doctor threw open the heavy shirt as he spoke, and there was revealed upon the broad chest, pricked in with Indian ink, a pair of crossed sabers, and the name:

"DANIEL DUNCAN,"

5th Cavalry, U. S. Army."

"This man," continued the doctor, "when I was on post-duty, killed an officer, and when in the guard-house, awaiting trial, killed his guard and fled."

"He was sentenced to be shot whenever and whenever found, but he managed to escape."

"I do not remember to have seen the man when at the post, but, when I was taking care of him here once, I saw his name, as you see it now."

"It was some time after his crime, and I did not care to have the man's life on my conscience by betraying him, so I kept his secret, until that night he turned upon me here in the hotel, and knowing that I recognized him, he was but too glad to get out as I ordered."

"You have killed big game indeed, Hale; but did you find nothing about him, or did you search him?"

"I searched him, and, besides his arms, found this buckskin bag of gold, which is sufficient to bury him, if the major will be good enough to see to it."

"Certainly, and with pleasure, and I'll plant all such devils that you will kill, Mr. Hale, at my own expense," said the major, and then he added:

"I'll send Digger Dave, as our undertaker is called, to rig him up and plant him at once, and there'll be cash enough over to treat the boys all round."

"But come, gentlemen, let us have a glass to invigorate after this solemn occasion, and then go to breakfast."

The "glass to invigorate" was dispensed with by both the doctor and the miner, but the breakfast was done ample justice to, and during the while spent at the table, the crowd about the Gold Brick increased vastly, all anxious to see the Kid Glove Ghost Hunter, who had brought in such "big game."

CHAPTER XXIX.

GAMBLING FOR THE MINE.

THE excitement in Golden Gulch was intense when it became known that Danger Dan was the game which the Kid Glove Miner had brought down.

He had not been liked in the mines, and in fact was greatly feared, and few regretted his having been exiled by the doctor.

The citizens hoped that the death of the des-

perado would clear up the ghost mystery, and were sorely disappointed that it did not.

Frank Powell had told just who Danger Dan had been, and about his crime, and had made known the facts of his having been killed by the miner, but that was all he could tell.

"Hain't yer seen ther ghosts?" asked a curious fellow of the Kid Glove Miner.

"Oh, yes! Nightly I hear or see them, but I do not trouble them, and they seem to let me alone, except the warnings they give me to leave the mine," was the quiet answer.

"Waal, you bes ther narve ter ketch Satan by his horns an' jerk his forked tail out by ther roots," said the admiring miner, and this assertion of what Horace Hale had the nerve to do was received with a cheer.

After breakfast the Kid Glove Miner went out to make a purchase of some stores to carry back with him, and Frank Powell and Faro Fred accompanied him.

This being attended to, Horace Hale asked:

"How is Blackstone, doctor?"

"All right, I may say, as he was at Faro Fred's last night."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and he played heavily too," said the gambler.

"Then he gambled?"

"Oh, yes; and won."

"He is now asleep, I believe, but before you go back we will see him, if you say so," said the doctor.

"I am more than willing, Powell."

"In fact, if he will play me to-night for the mine I will remain over."

"He will do it, I'll wager; and he had luck with him last night," said Faro Fred.

"Well, we'll see who wins to night," was the quiet response.

Upon returning to the Gold Brick Plug Chew told the doctor that William Blackstone was up and dressed, and word was sent to ask if he would receive visitors.

"He see Melican man arlee samee," was Plug Chew's answer.

The three then went up to the room, and were greeted by William Blackstone in his courtly way.

He looked pale and thinner, but said he felt all right, and that his wound gave him no trouble.

"I am sorry to see that you are wounded, Mr. Hale," he said, in a kindly tone.

"It is slight, I am glad to say, and the doctor says will be all right soon."

"I have heard from Plug Chew, my medium of news, that you killed a man up at the mine last night?"

"Yes, a fellow whom the doctor knew as a murdering soldier, and whom he had exiled."

"He was at the cabin though, and not the mine, and when I sought to make him stand he gave me this wound."

"Then you shot him?"

"I fired a second after his shot."

"You are fortunate it was no worse; but when are we to have our game, Mr. Hale?"

"I told the doctor and Mr. Fairbanks that I would remain over to-night, if you felt able to play?"

"Oh yes, do so, and we will settle the matter, and if you win I'll throw the ghosts in."

"Have they disturbed you of late?"

"In some way I know of their presence every night."

"And you have found no solution to the mystery?"

"None."

"This is remarkable, for I cannot understand what it all means."

"Nor can I, sir."

"I only wish to God that I could," and the Kid Glove Miner spoke with an earnestness that was by no means feigned.

"Mr. Hale, I am no coward, I believe; but candidly, I'd not stay a night in that cabin alone for an equal sum to that left me by poor Elgin and his wife," said William Blackstone impressively.

"Nor would I," added Faro Fred.

Frank Powell laughed, and William Blackstone said:

"Oh you can laugh, Powell, for you are accustomed to being with the dead and covering them up after death; but I tell you frankly, I hate anything that I can't understand."

"I am not naturally superstitious, either, but when Doc told me all that took place up there, I weakened, and I pass on ghosts any time, now," said Faro Fred.

Horace Hale made no reply, and soon after the party adjourned to dinner, where they found the room crowded, and that during the meal the Kid Glove Miner was the cynosure of all eyes.

As he wanted a "full house," Faro Fred made known to Jacques that the mine was to be staked against a large sum, and played for by the Kid Glove Miner and William Blackstone, and consequently the Temple was densely packed, when night came on, all eager to witness the interesting game.

The frequenters of the "Temple" had been highly entertained the night before, when the Magic Doctor dropped in, accompanied by Wil-

liam Blackstone, who had at once begun to play heavily.

He had also won heavily; and the news had circulated that the inheritor of Ed Elgin's dust was a game player, and would doubtless be on hand the next night.

Faro Fred was on hand, calm and smiling, for whether his money was going out or coming in, it made no difference with his mien or humor.

He was always the same, winning or losing, and a favorite at all times.

A few of the better class of miners dropped in early and began playing, then others straggled along, and games were going merrily.

Yet all kept their eyes on the door for the coming men who were such attractions in Golden Gulch.

At last in came Major Simon Suggs, and with him was William Blackstone.

Faro Fred welcomed them, and invited them to his private table, at the same time ordering wine.

"Is not the Kid Glove Miner coming to-night?" asked a mine of the major.

"Ah, yes; but he went off with the doctor to see a patient, and will come from there directly here," was the answer.

All eyes scanned the face of William Blackstone, and he stood the ordeal with some nervousness, Faro Fred thought.

But soon the door opened and Frank Powell entered, and with him was the Kid Glove Miner.

Faro Fred advanced toward them and led them to his table, while every eye was upon the man who had dared dwell in the haunt of ghosts.

Faro Fred saw that he met the ordeal with an air of utter indifference, as he smilingly bowed to the major and his intended opponent.

Taking his seat he glanced over the sea of faces, nodding here and there, as he was spoken to by some one, and his appearance so won upon the crowd that a voice cried:

"Three cheers for ther Kid Glove Miner, pard!"

With a vim they were given, and rising Horace Hale bowed his thanks, and turning to the bar-tender said pleasantly:

"The gentlemen seem thirsty, so please place before them what they desire to order."

Another cheer greeted these words, and William Blackstone paused and bit his lip, for it told him that his opponent carried the wishes of the crowd with him.

After a short while the doctor said:

"Fred, Mr. Blackstone and Mr. Hale intend playing a little game together, so kindly give them a pack of cards."

"Certainly, Doc," and a fresh deck was placed upon the table while the two players took seats opposite to each other.

Instantly the crowd gathered around, and William Blackstone called for pen, ink and paper.

The articles were promptly furnished, and he said pleasantly:

"I will draw you up a paper, Mr. Hale, transferring to you all my right and title to my inheritance of the Elgin Mine, and you can cover the document with your money."

"That will do, sir," said the Kid Glove Miner, and William Blackstone hastily drew up the transfer paper, signed it, and then Frank Powell, Faro Fred, and Major Simon Suggs attached their signatures as witnesses.

As it was placed upon the table the Kid Glove Miner promptly took out a roll of banknotes and covered it, while he said:

"There are twenty-five hundred dollars there, Mr. Blackstone, which I believe was the sum agreed upon."

"Correct, sir."

The draw was made for the deal, and the Kid Glove Miner won, amid a murmur of applause, and he shuffled in a skillful way and dealt.

"One game, sir, or best two in three?" asked the miner.

"As you please, sir."

"Suit yourself."

"Then settle it by one game."

Horace Hale bowed, and the game was begun.

Both men played well, that was evident, and a deathlike silence rested upon all during its continuance, which broke out in exclamations of disappointment as the Kid Glove Miner lost.

"Replace the paper, if you please, Mr. Blackstone, and I will cover it again," was the cool reply, and a yell broke forth at the words, for the lookers on were terribly excited.

"Certainly, sir."

Again the paper was covered by the sum before put upon it, and again the game was begun.

But once more the Kid Glove Miner lost.

"Luck is against you, Mr. Hale," said William Blackstone with a light laugh.

"So far it seems so; but will you try again?" was the exceedingly calm reply.

"With pleasure."

Once again the deed to the mine was covered by the amount demanded, and a third time did the Kid Glove Miner lose.

But he remained perfectly cool, far more so than was William Blackstone.

In fact he was the only calm man in the room as Faro Fred, never before seen excited, even at his own losses, was now really anxious, and whispered:

"Powell, I like that fellow, and if you have any influence with him, don't let him throw away his money on that infernal old mine, for this Blackstone has a run of luck that is certain."

Before the doctor could reply, the Kid Glove Miner asked:

"Will you try a fourth game, sir?"

"I will, for in gambling I enjoy life," was the reply.

When the miner had a fourth time covered the deed, Blackstone said:

"You carry a large sum with you, sir."

"Not more, it seems, than I need to-night," was the smiling response.

Then the fourth game was played and ended as before.

But the miner's face did not change as he picked up the cards and shuffled them skillfully with the hand that rested in the sling.

As he remained quiet, William Blackstone said in a joyous tone:

"I have a run of fortune, sir, I do not fear to risk, so will try again, if you wish?"

"Not to-night, for I confers to having struck bed rock," was Horace Hale's reply.

"Permit me to stake you, Mr. Hale," said Frank Powell quickly.

"Thank you, doctor; but as I am a stranger to you I will not ask such a favor."

"Nonsense, I will gladly lend you the money."

"As frankly as you offer it, sir, I accept it," was the reply.

"You are right!"

"Here, Fred, let me have twenty-five hundred," said Frank Powell.

"Certainly, and if Mr. Hale needs another stake, he can have it from me," was Faro Fred's response.

"And I'll be generous too," and there was something like a sneer in William Blackstone's tone as he spoke:

"And place the ten thousand I have won upon the deed."

"Don't be a durned fool, pard," said a miner bluntly.

"No, luck is more fickle than a gal," said another.

"I risk the money on the deed, sir, for, if I lose, I simply am out the mine and what I won from you. Besides, Mr. Hale, I shall not lose," was the smiling reply of William Blackstone, as he placed the deed and the ten thousand in bank-bills upon the table.

"Do I understand, sir, that you place all this against my twenty-five hundred?" asked the miner.

"I do, sir."

"I refuse to play at such odds, sir."

"Then cover his bet with ten thousand, for I'll stake you," excitedly said Faro Fred.

"Thank you, Mr. Fairbanks, I accept your kind offer, sir, for, if I lose, I assure you I can pay back your money."

"I do not doubt it."

"Here, Mert, hand me over ten thousand," and Faro Fred called out to his cashier, who got it from the safe, as he had the sum which Frank Powell had drawn for the miner.

"Make this the best two in three games, please," said William Blackstone, with some little excitement of manner.

"Certainly," was the quiet response, and the first game was begun.

Slowly each man played, and it ended in the miner losing again.

Not a word was said, other than a call for drinks, and the second game was commenced.

It seemed to be tediously played, but at last ended, and with a shout of applause that made the glasses on the bar and tables ring.

The Kid Glove Miner had won.

William Blackstone turned deathly pale, and dashed off a glass of brandy in a nervous way; but no sign of excitement rested on the face of the miner.

It was William Blackstone's turn to shuffle and deal, and he did so with seeming great care.

Each man took up his cards, the miner's hand as firm as iron, and once more the silence of death reigned in the crowded room.

As the last card was thrown down by the Kid Glove Miner the building shook under the storm of applause, for he had won the mine.

And more, he had won back his money risked to gain the mine.

But he was perfectly cool, and called for drinks, while William Blackstone was evidently bit hard.

But he checked back his emotion and said:

"Will you play again, Mr. Hale?"

"No, sir, for the games I had to-night with you, are the first I ever played for a wager, and they shall be the last," was the response.

William Blackstone bit his lips, and turning to Frank Powell asked:

"Do you play, doctor?"

"No, sir: I do not gamble."

"And you, sir?" and he turned to Faro Fred, who answered indifferently:

"As you please, sir; but as your luck has changed, you had better await another night."

"I am the best judge of that, sir," was the haughty answer.

"Certainly," was the cool reply; and Faro Fred took his seat at the table, while Frank Powell and the Kid Glove Miner left the Temple, Major Suggs remaining to return home with his rich guest.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RETURN TO ELGIN MINE.

At an early hour the following morning the Kid Glove Miner arose, and Frank Powell dressed his wound for him, after which the two went down to breakfast, for the doctor had promised Horace Hale that he would accompany him to the cabin.

As they descended to the office they were confronted by Major Suggs, his eyes bloodshot, and face haggard.

"Why, major, you are up early!" said the doctor.

"Yes—been up all night, Doc, or it wouldn't have occurred. But you missed it—you missed it!"

"Missed what, major?"

"The fun," and it was very evident that the major had been imbibing freely.

"What fun?"

"Oh! you haven't heard it, eh?"

"No; and it don't seem as if we were likely to, from you."

"Come, what did we miss?"

"You know that fool?"

"What fool?"

"Blackstone."

"Oh, yes; but I didn't know him by his other name."

"What name, Doc?"

"Fool."

"Doc, you are poking fun at me."

"No, major; but what of Blackstone?"

"He is a fool."

"Well?"

"Why, he sat there last night and lost forty thousand dollars!"

"What?"

"Fact."

"Lost forty thousand dollars, major?"

"Fact; for I saw him lose it."

"How?"

"Gambled it away; for Faro Fred won it, although he kept telling the fool not to play. The night before he won ten thousand from Faro Fred."

"But he lost that, and thirty thousand more."

"Then, if he has nothing else than what I paid over to him, which was left him by Elegant Ed and his Angel, he'll soon be poor; for one-half of his fortune has gone," said Frank Powell.

"Fact—for he has only twenty-one thousand three hundred dollars in my safe now."

"Where is he?" asked the miner.

"In bed."

"Drunk?"

"Oh, no; for he quit drinking when he began to lose. But have an eye-opener with me, Doc?"

"No, thank you, major; our eyes are wide open, and another opener will about close yours up," and the doctor and the miner continued on to get their breakfast.

Soon after they were mounted and riding toward the mountains, leading the pack-horse, loaded down with provisions.

As they rode along there were many who recognized the Kid Glove Miner, and wished him luck, which caused the doctor to say:

"You have won the hearts of all in Golden Gulch, Hale."

The miner smiled, and answered:

"Not all, I guess, for Blackstone does not regard me favorably, I fear, nor does the band known as the Seven Stars."

"Curse those fellows, I have been watching them closely of late, for I only wish to get a chance to catch them in some devilry, and then they'll have to hang or travel, for I believe they are secretly at the bottom of half the mischief in Golden Gulch."

After a brisk ride of an hour and a half the two friends drew rein before the door of the Elgin cabin, and at the same time the eyes of the doctor and miner fell upon another placard that had been stuck up, evidently as a warning.

"Read your missive, Hale, and I will look after the horses," said the doctor, and the miner stepped forward and took down the piece of paper from the door, and which had been fastened up by sealing-wax, stamped with the same seal used before.

With a clouded brow the miner read:

"The end is coming, for, in spite of all warnings, you refuse to heed."

"Once more this warning is given!"

"Leave this spot forever ere it is too late!"

"Remain here, and it will be fatal to you."

"Go, I entreat you, go!"

"Lois."

For some time he stood in silence, a strange look upon his face, and when the doctor came up and joined him, he silently handed him the

Frank Powell read it carefully through twice, and then said:

"Lois was the name of Ed's wife?"

"Yes."

"Well, what will you do?"

"Follow the motto's advice of *nil desperandum*."

"Bravo for you, Hale!"

"Now let us get your stores in the cabin, and then we'll have a look around to see if the ghosts have been digging any gold during your absence."

All was soon in order in the cabin, and then the two men went down toward the mine, Powell saying sadly as he passed the grave:

"Poor Ed and his Angel!"

"These infernal ghosts would cause us to believe that they do not rest in peace."

The Kid Glove Miner made no reply, and they soon reached the mine.

But there all was found as it had been left, and returning to the cabin, after an hour's talk together, the doctor mounted his horse and set off upon his return to Golden Gulch, leaving the Kid Glove Miner once more alone in his newly-acquired but desolate home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RUINED GAMBLER.

For several days Golden Gulch was kept in a fever of excitement, for nightly did William Blackstone go to the Temple and play heavily against Faro Fred, and, with a loss of luck, which slowly decreased his fortune.

At last he went one night, pale, haggard, and determined, and he carried with him two thousand dollars, every dollar he had in the world, he told Frank Powell.

"You are a fool to risk it then on a game of chance," was the blunt reply.

"But luck may turn in my favor."

"Bah! What if it does, and you win back all you have lost, you will still keep gambling, and again be poor."

"No, one day I will be rich."

"You may, and the next be a pauper."

"Come and see me play to-night."

"Upon one condition."

"Name it, doctor."

"That you deposit with me five hundred dollars of your money, in case you lose the balance."

"Agreed," and the money, to the amount of five hundred, was counted out and handed over to the doctor.

Then the two walked around to Faro Fred's.

A large crowd had assembled, expecting the coming of William Blackstone, and smaller games were in full blast when he entered.

Faro Fred met them, and said shortly:

"Have you come to play, Mr. Blackstone?"

"I have, sir."

"Well, I desire to say a word to you."

"I am all attention."

"It is not my desire to ruin any man in my gambling hell, and I wish to tell you that I know not what your income or your wealth may be, but, as I have heard it reported that I am winning all you are worth, I have only to say that this night, whether you win or lose, must end your playing here."

"This is rather severe, sir, for if I lose it is my own lookout," was the haughty reply.

"It shall be my lookout, sir, whether you win back what you have lost, or lose what you risk to-night, to see that you shall not play here again."

"I am a gambler, and I make my money by the turn of a card; but I will not take the last money a man has, nor will I have it said that I knowingly do so."

"You may be worth many a thousand, but whatever you have, to-night ends your playing here, though I shall always be glad to see you and entertain you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now let us to our game, and there is my stake."

He threw down five hundred dollars as he spoke and he won the money.

Instantly he staked what he had won, and his own fifteen hundred upon the next game, and again he won.

The entire amount then went on the turn of the next game, and he lost.

He turned of an ashen hue, and said, hoarsely:

"Powell, give me that money of mine!"

"I will not do so now. To-morrow you can have it."

"I wish it now."

"I will not give it up to you now."

"Then come."

He arose from the table and left the saloon, accompanied by the doctor.

"Powell, I am a ruined man!" he groaned, as he stepped out into the street.

"You have five hundred dollars, health, and can get a claim here that may pay you well."

"Give up gambling and go to work, and you may make your fortune."

"I came here with but my horse, arms, and sixty dollars, and, though mining panned out small for me, I am doing well at my profession,

so do not you despair," and Frank Powell spoke in a kindly tone.

"But I do despair, and to-night I start upon the downward road."

They had now reached the Gold Brick, and the doctor urged the man to come up to his room.

But he refused, and demanded his money.

"Here, major, I have five hundred dollars of Mr. Blackstone's money, and it is all he has in the world, for he has lost all else to night."

"I wish him to invest this in a mine and go to work; but if he demands it, of course I give it up, and in your presence," and the doctor turned to Major Suggs, who nodded approvingly.

"Give me the money, doctor, and let me go my way."

"You have been kind to me, and I thank you, though I have seen that you never liked me."

"Major, I believe I owe you a little something."

"Twenty-nine dollars and fifty cents, sir," was the prompt reply.

The money was paid, and the ruined gambler turned away and went to his room, leaving the doctor and the major in the office.

In a few minutes he returned, bringing with him his traps.

"You are not going to-night, Mr. Blackstone?" said the doctor in a kindly tone.

"Yes."

"No, remain here, and in a few days I'll look you up a lead."

"No, thank you, I must go."

"But where?"

"I do not know," was the low reply, and then came the words in a bitter tone:

"Nor do I care."

"Luck came to me, and all seemed well. It has left me, and all is wrong. Good-night, gentlemen."

Again he moved toward the door, where he met the Kid Glove Miner face to face.

"Ah, Mr. Blackstone, I came down to the Gulch to-night to make a deposit of some money with Faro Fred, and I just learned of your ill-fortune," said the miner, in a feeling tone.

"Yes, I am ruined," was the bitter reply.

"Not so bad as that, I hope."

"Even worse, for I have my all in the world with me here, and am just starting away."

"No, you must remain, for I can afford to do right by you."

"Come, the mine has panned out well, far better than I had expected, and I shall at least insist upon paying you the twenty-five hundred you asked me for it."

"No, I will not accept a gift from any man; but I will stake five hundred dollars, all I have left, against a fifth interest in the mine, and play you for it."

"I am no gambler, sir, and, as I told you, played my first wager game, and my last, with you."

"But I will pay you the sum named with pleasure."

"Good-night, Mr. Kid Glove Miner," was the rude response, and the ruined gambler went out of the hotel into the darkness.

"Let him go, and mourn him not," said the major, sententiously.

But the doctor and the miner seemed not made of the same cold-blooded material that the major was composed of, and talked together to see if something could not be done for the man, who certainly held their pity.

"He may feel better about it in the morning, so we will look him up and buy him a claim and set him to work," said the Kid Glove Miner.

But with the morrow William Blackstone seemed even more gloomy when found, and, having herded with the gang in the Devil's Half Acre, he seemed content to accept the lot he had chosen, and rudely repulsed the kind offers of the doctor and the miner, and they left him in disgust to his fate, which fate was to, within a few weeks' time, sink so low that he became known as Black Bill the Bravo.

Such was the fall of William Blackstone to Black Bill, a name, the latter one, which was soon found to fit him well.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BLONDE BILL TO THE RESCUE.

From some strange reason, after the last warning of the ghosts, stuck upon the door of the Kid Glove Miner's cabin, he was not troubled by any more missives of the kind, nor was his slumber disturbed at night by songs and guitar music.

Frank Powell, who made several visits a week to the cabin, asserted that the killing of Danger Dan had frightened the ghosts, but the miner shook his head at this, evidently not sharing in the doctor's opinion.

At any rate he could give no reason for the let-up in warnings, and thus the matter rested, his slumbers undisturbed by night, and his work by day panning out richly.

In Golden Gulch he had become a hero, and as popular with the Gulchites as was Frank Powell himself, whom all looked upon as their idol, and insisted upon calling him the Magic Doctor.

One day when he rode into the Gulch, the Kid Glove Miner heard a startling piece of news as he rode up to the Gold Brick, and met Frank Powell.

"Well, doctor, what news?" asked the miner. "Our friend has utterly gone to the bad," was the answer.

"William Blackstone?"

"Yes, known now as Black Bill, and certainly deserving the appellation."

"What has he done now?"

"Knocked the major in the head last night."

"Killed him?"

"Oh, no. Major Simon Suggs is a little tough, and dies hard."

"But Black Bill borrowed his purse, which contained several hundreds, and being discovered in the act, made a good fight and escaped."

"How rapidly he went downward in his course," sadly said the Kid Glove Miner.

"He did, indeed— Well, Tempest Tom, what news have you?" and the doctor turned to that worthy, who just then came up, followed by his shadows, Lanky and Duck Leg Dick.

"I has ter report, Doc— Lordy! Kid Glove pard, how is yer, an' hes yer seen ther ghosts o' late?" and Tom turned to the miner, and held forth his hand.

"No, Tom, not lately."

"Waal, waal, an' I hopes yer won't see 'em ag'in."

"But, Doc, we followed that cantankerous varmint, Black Bill, clean into Echo Gap, an' thar we hed ter lose him."

"Could you not follow his trail?"

"Lordy, yes, only we didn't want ter, as thar was that ag'in' our doin' so which we didn't wish ter tackle, seein' as how they was too many fer us."

"Who do you mean?"

"Yer see, we'd hev overtook Black Bill, fer when his horse were shot by Lanky here, he got hurted a leetle, as we c'd see, fer he run lame."

"But, jist as we druv him into Echo Gap, whar he were about ter turn at bay, as tho' he preferred ter fight it out ter run on, thar came tearin' down ther canyon a band o' galoots that jist took his part."

"Not miners?"

"Nary, Doc; but them road-agents."

"The Tax-gatherers?"

"Them same."

"They are a bad lot, and you did right not to attack them."

"They was jist a leetle too numerous, we bein' three, an' they countin' nine."

"But who does yer think I see actin' as ther leader, an' who were ther fust man ter ther side o' Black Bill?"

"I do not know."

"Guess, Doc, fer it are worth ther torture."

"Come, Tom, out with it."

"Waal, it were Blonde Bill."

"What?"

"Fact."

"Has he taken to highway robbing?"

"So it seems."

"Perhaps the men you saw were not the band of road-agents we call Tax-gatherers."

"I knows 'em, Doc, for they all wears black pants, red shirts, and white slouch hats, don't th'yer?"

"Yes, so Monk Harris and those who have seen them report."

"Waal, they was dressed that way."

"And Blonde Bill, too?"

"No, he were in his mining-rig; but I knows him."

"Yes, he is a man not easily forgotten if once seen."

"He was the man that I saw at the grave of Elgin and his wife, I believe!" said the Kid Glove Miner.

"Yes."

"And he has taken to road robbing?"

"So it seems."

"I have long suspected he was up to mischief, but could not get proof of it."

"But, now, if he has taken to the road, and has Black Bill as an ally, they will make it hot for the stages."

"You bet they will, Doc," said Tempest Tom, while Lanky added:

"An' they'll git considerable dust, fer ther stages goes well loaded now."

"Yes, an' some o' 'em will git lead in 'em," put in Duck Leg Dick.

The three hunters then went on into the hotel, to interview Jacques, and in a short while the news spread through Golden Gulch that Black Bill had turned road-agent and had joined a band which had for its captain none other than Blonde Bill, a miner well known to many of the Gulchites as a silent man, working a lead some distance away, and about whom there seemed to hang a mystery.

And this man it was, a stranger to Black Bill, who had saved him from capture and death, for his capture by the hunters on his trail meant certain death when they took him back to Golden Gulch and gave him up to the Vigilantes.

No one then doubted, under the circumstances, that Black Bill would unite his for-

tures with Blonde Bill, and become one of the dreaded Tax-gatherers of the mountain trail over which the stages to and from Golden Gulch had to pass three times a week each way.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TAKING TOLL.

"THAR has been trouble ahead, an' I are ther man ter find it out."

The speaker was Monk Harris, a personage already known to the reader, and the driver of the stage in and out of Golden Gulch.

He was driving along the coach trail, going at a slow pace, for he was ascending a hill, when he suddenly discovered two persons in the road ahead of them.

One of these was a man of fifty, with gray hair and mustache, a military air, and who was stiff-rig from a severe cut upon the head, which a maiden, the second person, was endeavoring to bind up.

The maiden's face was pale, yet very beautiful, and she possessed a form of exquisite grace.

At one side of the road was an ambulance, to which no horses were attached, and the vehicle had the appearance of having been rifled of its contents.

As they drew near, Monk Harris explained to a passenger, who sat upon the box with him, who those ahead were.

He said, in his quaint way:

"It are Colonel Roland, the superintendent o' ther comp'ny started fer ther new mine at Golden Gulch, which they calls ther Bonanza, whatever that may mean."

"He, ther colonel, were a army officer onst, I hear tell, but resigned on account o' losin' a arm, which yer sees he hain't got but one."

"The gal are his darter, Ruby Roland, ther colonel calls her, an' ef she hain't ther sweetest plum o' ther puddin' the Lord take me fer a liar."

"Yer see they was a comin' by stage, but ther colonel hed so much truck ter bring, that he bought an ambulance an' horses, an' jist hes kept along with ther coaches all ther way, so Driver Bent told me at ther last station."

"I know'd ther colonel were goin' on ahead, havin' heard him say so, an' I told him ter hev a keer 'bout ther Tax-gatherers, an' now yer sees they hev been ordered ter halt, an' it do look as though they'd been treated shabby; but ef them devils hes said a cruel word ter ther pretty gal, I'll jist tell Doc Powell, or the Kid Glove Miner, an' ef they don't make it hot fer them Road Collectors, you kin shoot me fer a born fool."

"Hello, colonel, hes yer been robbed?" and drawing his team to a halt Monk Harris sprang from the box and approached the gentleman and his daughter.

"Yes, driver, we were set upon by two men I did not suspect as villains, and I was struck here on the head, as you see, and stunned."

"Then they robbed us of our money, and my daughter's jewelry, went through our traps, took our horses and decamped, not five minutes before you came in sight."

"Two men, yer say, colonel?"

"Yes, a large, superb-looking man with long black hair and beard."

"Black Bill, as I lives," cried Monk Harris.

"The other was a smaller man, of slender form, and with light-brown hair and a full beard."

"Blonde Bill, his pard; but, colonel, jist git inter ther hearse, you an' yer darter, an' I'll hev yer inter Golden Gulch in half a hour, an' then yer'll see how quick my pard's will start on the trail o' them two cusses."

"Don't mind yer ambulance, fer we'll send back fer it, and thar are no fear o' it bein' disturbed."

The advice of Monk Harris was quickly followed by Colonel Roland and his daughter, and springing upon his box once more the driver sent his team flying along the road to Golden Gulch.

Those who saw the coach coming, at full speed of the horses, thought that some kind passenger had gotten Monk Harris drunk.

But he reined up in splendid style, just at the door, and sung out to Frank Powell, who was seated on the piazza of the Gold Brick, talking to the Kid Glove Miner:

"Say, Doc, git inter yer saddle, you an' Kid Gloves, fer thar has been ther devil ter pay back down ther road, an' Black Bill and Blonde Bill hev been ther sarpints that did it."

As Doctor Powell and the miner sprang to the side of the coach, Colonel Roland dismounted, and in a few words told his story.

"Quick, Hale, get our horses ready, and ask Faro Fred to join us—yes, and there come Tempest Tom and his pards, so mount them on good horses, too, and we'll need no others."

"Ceptin' yours truly, fer I goes too, Doc," cried Monk Harris.

"All right, Monk, we could wish for no better a man, so get ready as quickly as you can, while I look after this gentleman, whom I see is wounded."

Frank Powell led the colonel into the hotel, while the major escorted the beautiful Ruby, and in a very short time he had dressed the

wound, and promising to bring back their stolen property, he left the father and daughter.

Five minutes after they saw him ride away, accompanied by six other horsemen, all of them armed to the teeth.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PURSUIT.

"BILL, they are gaining upon us."

"That is so, Blondy."

The first speaker was the man that had been known as William Blackstone, but who had gone downward in his career until he had turned to highway robbery and leagued himself with his companion, Blonde Bill, the leader of the Tax-gatherers.

They had intended robbing the stage, but had come upon the ambulance of Colonel Roland, and the result we already know.

With their plunder packed upon the horses taken from the ambulance, and rejoicing in a rich haul of money and jewelry, they had left the scene of the robbery, and gone leisurely upon their way, not dreading pursuit, for not once had their depredations been punished by the people of Golden Gulch.

Halting for rest, they ate their lunch, and then, as the day was warm, indulged in a short nap.

But, as they mounted their horses, they suddenly discovered a party of horsemen coming rapidly upon their trail.

"Pursued, by Heaven!" cried Blonde Bill.

"Yes, and I know those men," answered Black Bill.

Instantly they urged their own, and the ambulance horses forward at full speed in flight.

Looking back, Black Bill said:

"They have pressed their horses hard, and ours have the advantage of a rest."

"But we must not let them come up, for they are no men to trifle with."

"I see the Kid Glove Miner there," said Blonde Bill.

"Yes, and Doctor Powell, and Faro Fred, Monk Harris the stage-driver, ay and those three hunters."

"I tell you, Blondy, we are in for it."

"We must fight."

"Bahl fight those men?"

"Why not?"

"Do you know Powell?"

"By reputation."

"Well, he is a terrible fellow, and he hangs on like a bloodhound."

"Then there is the Kid Glove Miner."

"Yes, I know him."

"And he will never say die."

"That is his nature."

"Then Monk Harris is a bad man to fight."

"The driver?"

"Yes."

"True, he is as fearless as a lion, as I have had reason to know."

"Faro Fred, too, is Satan's own cub, as I have had reason to know."

"Well, the three others you also know," coolly said Blonde Bill.

"I do, for they are the men you saved me from."

"A queer lot, but game to the bone, and they are seven to two of us."

"If we only had our boys out of the Gap."

"But we have not, and if we had, with yonder party they would do no good."

"You talk as if you would just lay down and let them come on and kill us."

"No; I would surrender though."

"That means barging."

"I don't know about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Powell is not a Vigilante, nor are the others, and he is opposed to hanging."

"He will keep us for trial, and in that time we can escape."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll do all we can to escape, and if we find that we cannot, why we'll surrender and take the chances, for if we are put in prison there is one who will free us."

"Yes, that one will free us," said Black Bill, and the two pressed on the harder.

Finding that the led horses were retarding them, they decided to let them go.

"Better give up the plunder, Blondy."

"So say I," was the answer, and the led horses were let go.

Then they rode on the faster, but looked back to see what effect their giving up their booty had upon their pursuers.

One man, Duck Leg Dick, they saw drop back to catch the horses and the others came on.

"His horse was failing and so they used him," growled Black Bill.

"Yes, and they are gaining," hoarsely said Blonde Bill.

This fact was soon evident at least, that three of the pursuers were gaining rapidly, their horses having seemed to get their second wind, for they were coming on at a pace that would not keep them long behind the pursued.

Deep into the flanks of their animals the fu-

gatives drove their spurs, and urged them on with their voices.

But, though good beasts, those that followed them were better.

"Shall we fight, Bill, for we have but one time to die?"

"No, Blondy, for if we kill or wound one they'll make quick work of us."

"Then what do you say?"

"Draw rein and up with our hands."

"All right; when?"

"Now!"

Back upon their haunches the two outlaws then reined their horses, and up above their heads went their hands.

Thus they remained, awaiting the coming of their foes.

A moment after, and Frank Powell and the Kid Glove Miner darted up, followed by Faro Fred.

"Mr. Blackstone, we meet again, and I hope you realize the necessity of my disarming you," said Doctor Powell.

"I do," was the reply.

"And we too meet again, sir," said the Kid Glove Miner, placing his pistol against the head of Blonde Bill.

But the latter uttered no word, and drooped his head, as though he cared not to look his foe in the face.

In an instant they were disarmed, bound to their saddles, and the horses' heads were turned back toward Golden Gulch, Monk Harris remarking:

"I guesses that I kin drive this trail in peace arter this, unless ther ghosts o' you two murder-in' Bills haunts me on dark nights."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WOMAN'S SENTENCE.

COLONEL ROLAND and his daughter sat in their rooms at the Gold Brick listening to the gossip of their facetious landlord, the major.

"Don't you fear, miss," he said, for the fiftieth time:

"Don't you fear, for those men will be brought back prisoners, if it takes a week to do it, for I know well every individual that has gone on their trail."

Then the major gave a history of each one of the pursuers, commencing with Frank Powell and ending with Tempest Tom.

"You have some remarkable men in this country, Major Sigs," said Ruby Roland, greatly interested.

"Indeed, we are remarkable men, Miss Roland, out here in Golden Gulch."

"I half feared to bring my daughter here with me, sir, knowing to what a wild community I was coming; but I am glad to find, from your accounts, that there is so much good among the bad," said the colonel.

"True, sir, true."

"Now there is Doc Powell, a man among a million, and the Kid Glove Miner—"

"What a remarkable name."

"What a remarkable man, miss, for he is a wonder."

"His name is Horace Hale, but he always wears gloves, and the boys call him the Kid Glove Miner, as I told you— By Heaven! ah, I beg pardon, miss, and you must excuse my French, but here are the dear boys back again, and more, that cheer tells me that they have their prisoners."

The major dashed out of the room, but soon returned to ask if Colonel Roland would see the prisoners.

"Yes, ask the gentlemen to bring their captives in here," he said, rising from the lounge upon which he had been lying.

The next moment in came Doctor Powell and the prisoners, followed by all of the captors.

Both captives hung their heads as they entered, while the doctor said:

"These are the men, Colonel Roland, who robbed you, are they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And is this your money, sir?"

"It is," and the colonel took the wallet handed to him by the doctor.

"And these things belong to you, do they not, Miss Roland?"

"Thank you, yes," and Ruby Roland grasped her jewelry, which she had never expected to see more.

"We captured your ambulance horses also, and one of my men put your traps back in the vehicle and will soon be here with it."

"I do not know, sir, how I can thank you, and your friends, for your kindness."

"I expect to remain in your town as a resident, having come to take charge of the Bonanza mine, and I trust we will often meet as friends," said the colonel warmly.

"And I too owe you more thanks than I can express, and shall lay claim to your friendship," said Ruby Roland, in her earnest way, which at once won every heart, especially as she extended her hand to the doctor, and then to each one of the party, Tempest Tom keeping her waiting until he had rubbed his palm violently against his sleeve, while he said in his blunt way:

"It hain't fer sich as you be, miss, ter shake; but ef yer wants it, yer kin hev it."

A burst of laughter followed this innocent offer that Tempest Tom had made, and blushing, Ruby answered:

"I certainly shall claim it in friendship, sir."

"Ther heart shell go with it, miss," said Tom, floundering deeper into the mire without realizing that he was making a blunder.

"Now, Miss Roland, it remains for you to decide the fate of these prisoners," said Frank Powell solemnly, coming to Ruby's rescue.

"For me?" she cried.

"Yes, Miss Roland, for in this wild land justice often follows quickly upon the heels of crime, and as we know these men to be guilty, they must be punished at once."

"And that punishment will be?" she falteringly asked.

"It is for you to decide, Miss Roland."

She looked pained, and turned to her father, who said:

"My child, as their sentence rests with you, you must decide as to their fate."

She looked earnestly at the prisoners, and seemed to study every feature, as though striving to read their inmost souls.

Then she turned to Doctor Powell and asked:

"If I did not decide, what would be their fate?"

"They would be hanged within the hour."

She shuddered at the answer, and again turned to the prisoners, and caught their appealing look.

Then to Doctor Powell she said:

"And you will abide my decision?"

"Certainly, Miss Roland."

"You will accept my sentence, be it what it may?"

"We will."

Again turning to the prisoners she said:

"Men, you seem to have known what it was to have led far different lives, from the one of crime you now lead."

"To die, with your sins unrepented of is too fearful to think of, and I wish you to live that you may change your lives."

"If I spare you will you pledge yourselves to, from this night, become changed men, and never again stoop to commit crime?"

"I pledge you," said Black Bill in a low, quivering voice.

"I mean it," answered Blonde Bill solemnly.

"Perjured liars, both of 'em, muttered Monk Harris."

"Then go, for I set you free, and may your punishment hereafter be according to the lives you lead from this night on."

"God bless you," said Black Bill, while, suddenly grasping her hand, Blonde Bill pressed his lips to it.

Then the two men turned to their captors and stood in silence.

Frank Powell looked annoyed, but stepping forward quickly severed their bonds, while he said:

"Tom, give them back their arms and horses, and escort them out of Golden Gulch."

"Thank you, sir," said Ruby Roland, and, as the two prisoners left the room, Colonel Roland said:

"I hope, Doctor Powell, that my daughter has not done wrong in following the dictates of her heart?"

"Those men are depraved utterly, sir, and though I hope for the best, I fear that she has made a mistake in setting them free."

"Yes, they will prove their bloodbound nature before a week goes by," was the stern remark of Faro Fred as he strode from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BROKEN PLEDGES.

WHEN Tempest Tom moved off with the two pardoned prisoners, Duck Leg Dick suddenly came to his side and said something in a low whisper.

"All right, pard, seein' as ther' is two ter be escorted, it are but fair to send two escorts," said the old hunter aloud.

Mounted upon their own horses, and with Tom carrying their weapons, the released prisoners started upon their way through the streets of Golden Gulch.

Had those whom they passed *en route* known who they were, there is little doubt but that speedy justice would have been served out to them then and there.

But, without accident they passed through the different camps and came at last in sight of the twinkling lights that marked the cabins of Bender and his men.

"You need go no further with us, my man," said Black Bill quietly.

"I hes my orders ter see yer out o' camp, an' I'll do it," was the response.

"You have passed the town limits, and can release us here."

"No, yonder are some cabins, and I guesses I'll escort you by 'em," and Tempest Tom pointed to Bender's camp.

Black Bill did not again speak, and they rode on in silence, until they saw a group of men standing by the trail watching their coming.

"It is Boss Bender and his band," quietly said Blonde Bill.

"Hello, pards, yer rides late towards ther mountains."

"Beant yer afeerd o' Bligh's ghosts?" called out Bender.

"Yes, Boss Bender, and we would like to have your company to keep them off," answered Black Bill.

"Not any fer us; but I knows yer now, fer I recognizes ther pair o' Bills, an' I is sorry ter see yer in sich bad company, fer I notices now, ther it are Tempest Tom and Duck Leg Dick that yer is 'sociatin' with."

"Yer go ter thunder, Boss Bender, or, yer'll git inter trouble, an' I doesn't want ter bev ter dis'pint ther hangman," growled the old hunter, as the party passed on.

That the Bender party knew that something was wrong was very evident.

They had, strange to say, been working over in their mines all day, and had not heard of the robbery on the trail, nor the capture of Black Bill and his companion.

They were just starting out for the Gold Brick, when they saw the four horsemen coming; but Tempest Tom was no man to get into trouble with, and so they said nothing more and the party passed on.

"Waal, pards, I guesses Dick an' me kin leave yer bein' an' we gives yer back yer arms an' with it a small piece o' advice, for which we makes no extra charge."

"Thet advice be ther yer reforms, an' tries ter keep from bein' hanged, fer thar be plasanter ways o' passin' in yer checks then at the end o' a rope."

"Yer has been spa'ed when yer oughter hev been swung, but thet is did, an' can't be undid."

"Good-by, pards, an' luck go with yer, fer I believes yer is goin' ter do better arter what yer told ther leetle gal."

Tempest Tom then handed over the weapons to each man, and told them quietly to go.

"Good-by, pards," said Black Bill, and as he spoke there came two flashes and reports commingling, and the two hunters fell from their horses.

"Well done, Blondy!"

"Now, back an' get the Bender gang!" cried Black Bill, and the two murderers dashed back upon the trail, leaving their victims lying where they had fallen, and carrying their horses with them.

The Seven Stars heard the rapid clatter of hoofs, and recognized Black Bill and his comrade, leading two riderless horses.

"Ho, Boss, we have settled them, and it was to save you."

"Quick, men! for the secret is out that you have been posting the Tax-gatherers with news and aiding us, and you are walking right into a trap set for you."

"To your cabins, and get your traps, and go with us!"

This was said in rapid but distinct tones, and spread consternation among the Seven Stars, Bender saying:

"Yer don't mean it thet they knows at ther Gulch thet we is yer secret pards?"

"I do mean it."

"We struck the ambulances of the old colonel, whom you told us was coming, and robbed him and his daughter; but Doc Powell, Faro Fred, that accursed Kid Glove Miner and others gave chase and captured us."

"But the girl spared us, and Tempest Tom and Duck Leg were escorting us out of camp to set us free."

"But, knowing your danger, we shot them, and came back to warn you."

"And yer kilt them?"

"Yes, they lie back on the trail. But come, if you would save yourselves, and with you, and our own men, we can make it warm for the citizens of Golden Gulch."

"We is yer pards, you bet, an' it strikes me we hesn't much time ter swap away," said Bender.

"No, for the Vigilantes are lying in wait for you now."

This settled it, and the gang hastened back to their cabins, accompanied by Black Bill and Blonde Bill.

All of them had horses near by, and it took such men but a few minutes to "pack up," and the party soon dashed off toward the mountains.

"I did want ter make a raid with ther boys, onter thet Kid Glove chap in ther mountains, and his mine, fer I knows he has heaps o' dust hided away thar," said Boss Bender, sorrowfully.

"We can do that better from my retreat than from Golden Gulch," said Blonde Bill, and he added: "I have had my eye on him for some time."

"Waal, we is in fer it, thet are sure, an' we bes ter do our duty."

"Yes, for in that way only can we save our necks."

"Blonde Bill here has eight men in his land, you are seven, and with ourselves we make seventeen; and I defy any party of Vigilantes to follow us up the Gap."

"No, we can hold our own against Golden Gulch, but— Good God! Where is Tempest Tom?"

They all drew rein suddenly, for but one form was visible lying in the road, where they had shot two men down.

Throwing himself from his saddle Bender said, as he bent over the prostrate form:

"This are Duck Leg Dick, an' he are dead."

"Yes, but where is Tempest Tom?"

"I gives it up."

"Gone back to the Gulch to set the hounds upon our trail!"

"Come, men, we must ride for it!" cried Blonde Bill, and the party dashed off at a rapid gallop.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE KID GLOVE MINER TAKES THE TRAIL.

AFTER the occurrence of the exciting scene in the room of Colonel Roland, all were leaving, when Doctor Powell and the Kid Glove Miner were begged to remain.

"I am anxious to know you gentlemen better," said the colonel, "and as I am a perfect stranger here, I would be glad if you would give me what information you can, while you, sir, I must ask to look after this wound for me once more, as it gives me a little pain."

Frank Powell introduced Horace Hale to the colonel and his daughter, and then left the miner to entertain Ruby, while he set to work to redress the wound, for in his haste, he had not taken the time to examine it carefully before.

"It is a worse wound than I at first supposed, colonel, but there is no fracture of the bone, and you will speedily rally from it," he said, and he once again dressed it, and the colonel said he felt greatly relieved.

Then the conversation became general, and after an hour passed pleasantly, the doctor and miner were rising to take their leave, when the door opened suddenly, and Tempest Tom staggered into the little parlor.

His face was ghastly, and he was bleeding from a wound in the neck.

"Great God! Tom, my poor fellow, what has happened?" cried Frank Powell, springing to his side, and placing a seat for the wounded man, around whom the others quickly crowded.

"I doesn't blame you, miss, fer yer acted from yer leetle tender heart; but yer sees ther faith yer put in them durned devils!" said Tom.

"Hal they turned on you when you gave them their arms!" cried the Kid Glove Miner.

"They did, fer a fact. They shot both Dick an' me."

"He are dead, lyin' in ther road—here are I, an' they is gone, with Boss Bender and his gang, a-cavortin' fer ther mountains."

"I lit out, an' I got here by hard scratchin'; and now yer knows all."

"May God forgive me for what I did!" cried poor Ruby.

"You acted from the best of motives, Miss Roland—so need not condemn yourself," said Horace Hale quietly.

In the mean time Frank Powell had torn away the hunting-shirt, and was examining the wound.

"Come, Tom; I'll get you to bed, and then we will see what can be done for you," he said in a kindly tone; and he aided the old hunter to a room near by, and went up after his box of "toys"—as he called his surgical instruments.

"That handsome, dark faced man was right, father, in what he said of those two murderers," said poor Ruby, referring to Faro Fred's remark that:

"They would prove their bloodhound nature before a week goes by."

"Alas! yes; but I have brought you to a wild country, my poor child," said the colonel.

"It will all come out well, father, I hope."

"I trust so, child; but now I must go and see about that poor old hunter," and Colonel Roland sought the room where Tempest Tom had been taken.

Lanky was there, with Frank Powell and the Kid Glove Miner, and as the colonel entered, the doctor said cheerily:

"Come in, sir."

"I hope the wound is not dangerous?"

"It is severe, sir; but I have extracted the bullet, and Tom is no man to die easily."

"No, I hangs on well, an' this hain't my first 'perience in bein' shot."

"I guess not, Tom; but you must keep that tongue still, or I'll sew up your mouth."

"All right, Doc, I'll keep still as a Methodist nigger at camp-meetin'."

"Now, Tom, I will see what can be done about following those rascals, for I'll run them to earth if it takes a month," said the doctor.

"I have ordered my horse, Powell, and will follow to-night as far as I can, and camp on their trail until you come up in the morning; but you had better bring a good force," said the Kid Glove Miner.

"I'll bring picked men, Hale; but you had better take Lanky here with you."

"I'll be glad to, and some of the boys will go along to bring back poor Dick's body."

"If I make any important discovery, I will send Lanky back."

"Good night," and Horace Hale stepped up to the bed and pressed the hand of Tempest Tom in silence, after which he left the room.

Ruby was pacing up and down the hall, and seeing him, asked anxiously:

"Oh, sir, is he, too, dead through my mistake?"

"No, Miss Roland, on the contrary he is doing well and, though dangerous, his wound is by no means necessarily fatal, and good nursing will bring him through."

"Thank you, sir, but are you leaving?"

"Yes; my home is up in the mountains, but now I am starting on the trail of those wretches, and next time," he added with a smile, "we will not leave them to your tender mercies."

He passed on, bowing low at her words:

"Do not be rash, sir, I beg you," and soon after she saw him ride away, accompanied by Lanky.

"That man is one I could love if I dared to," she muttered, half aloud.

"What, Ruby, still up?" said the colonel, entering the room.

"Yes, father, for I am anxious about you."

"Oh! I am all right, and Tempest Tom is doing better than we expected."

"This is glad news."

"Yes, and that dashing doctor leads a party at daylight on the trail of those murderers, and my word for it, the whole band will be wiped out."

"We are among a strange people, my child, but I must say that I never met three more remarkable men than those I saw to-night."

"In fact, I may say five, for those two cut-throats were born gentlemen, and would attract notice as grand-looking men anywhere."

"Then that gambler, Faro Fred they call him, has a *distingue* air, is courtly, and I liked him, while Powell has no superior in his profession, and with the Kid Glove Miner, is a splendid specimen of manhood."

"I agree with you, father. We have met some strange people here. But it is late, sir, so you had better retire," said the maiden; and soon after she had retired to her little room.

But not to sleep—for through the long hours of the night she lay awake, and before her eyes constantly arose the sad, handsome face of the Kid Glove Miner.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A VOW THAT WAS KEPT.

WHEN Horace Hale and Lanky left the Gold Brick, they were accompanied by two men who went with them to bring back the body of poor Dick.

They found him where he had fallen, and then the Kid Glove Miner and Lanky pushed on alone.

Knowing the trail that the outlaws must take, Lanky led the way until they came to where two trails branched off, one leading to the Echo Gap, and the other to the mountains where was the Elgin Mine.

"I think we'd miss it, pard, ter push on to-night, so we'd better camp here until mornin'," said Lanky.

"All right, you remain here, while I go on to my cabin."

"I will be back in time to join you in the morning when the doctor comes up," said Horace Hale, and he rode away toward his cabin.

He had no idea of finding any one there, and so drew rein suddenly, as he discerned a light ahead.

"By Heaven! some one is there, for that light comes from the door," he cried.

Dismounting, he hitched his horse, and cautiously crept forward until he gained the point in the hillside where he had watched Danger Dan from.

Then he saw who it was that had made him a visit.

The door was wide open, and a fire was burning brightly, so that the interior of the cabin was plainly visible.

Within were moving forms, and his deep-toned words showed who they were:

"Bender and his gang!"

"Now my vow shall be kept, for fate has brought them here!"

Instantly he drew a revolver in each hand and advanced fearlessly toward the cabin.

The gang within little dreamed of danger, and were busy around the table, dividing his bag of gold, which had been found and spread out before them.

"Ho! surrender, all of you!"

The words rung out in thunder tones, and the outlaws uttered cries of alarm, and drew their revolvers, while two of them sprung toward the door.

Instantly they dropped dead in their tracks, for two shots flashed forth, and bullets pierced their brain.

Then the others saw that they were fairly caught, for the blazing fire could not be put out. Had they only lighted candles, then they could have extinguished them and been in darkness too.

"Who are you that calls us ter up with our hands?" yelled Boss Bender.

"I am one who has sworn to bring your band to death."

"I have been on your trail for a long time, waiting and watching."

"There were ten of you to deal with, and two of those—Danger Dan and Bowie Knife Dick—I have slain."

"Now comes your turn."

"I guesses not."

"Come, pards. He are but one, so we'll run on him," shouted Bender.

Several of them sprung from their covert in the cabin, and at once two more shots rung out, and Shorty and Pegleg bit the dust, falling in the doorway.

Boss Bender and his remaining pards at once retreated, and then came the words:

"Bender, do you and your two comrades surrender?"

A silence followed, and then came the answer:

"What is yer goin' ter do with us?"

"Answer me!"

"Do you surrender?"

"Yes."

"Then one of you come out at a time, but stand there in the firelight, and throw down your arms."

One of the wretches stepped forward and obeyed, and as he came out, the Kid Glove Miner threw him down, and with a lariat taken from a peg on the cabin side, he bound him.

Then a second followed and was secured, and last came Bender to meet the same fate.

Dragging his prisoners and the dead into the cabin, the Kid Glove Miner said:

"You asked me who I am."

"I will tell you."

"See here!"

He drew off his gloves as he spoke, and held up his hands.

"Do you know me now?"

"It are all up with us," groaned Boss Bender, and his two comrades echoed the groan.

There, in the right hand was a scar, burned into the palm, and it read:

"Murderer!"

In the left hand was another scar, and it read:

"Thief!"

"Ah yes, you know me now."

"You know me as the man whom you accused of murdering my poor sister, and her husband, Edgar Elgin."

"You punished me to frighten me away, by making me this way for life, while you robbed me of the money Lucky Pete intrusted to my care."

"I vowed revenge, and I now have it."

"I have long lived upon the Southern prairies, and this life, wild as it is, was not new to me, so I went to work to keep my vow."

"I shaved off my long beard, cut off my hair, and you did not know me."

"I came here to see them I loved, and invest with them in their mine, to bring out its full value."

"You know the result."

"And more, a paper among their effects, written to a man that was to be our agent, caused their property to be sent, as was supposed, to him."

"But I have traced it all out, and I know that the cousin of William Blackstone, Henry Blackstone by name, killed him to get the money and played his part."

"That man is the one they now call Black Bill, and his days are numbered."

"And more, I know now, for I have solved the mystery, that Blonde Bill hired Danger Dan and his Bowie Knife pard, to kill Ed Elgin and his wife."

"I know that Blonde Bill killed poor Lucky Pete, but fled ere he could rob him, upon seeing me."

"I know that Blonde Bill is one who was my boyhood friend."

"He loved my sister Lois, whose grave is down the glen, and his sister loved Edgar Elgin."

"Lois refused him and married the man she loved, and sad was her fate."

"But he, Will Weldon, came to the West a hunted man, and here his sister joined him."

"They had both gone to the bad, and here they lived."

"Here they met Elgin and his wife and plotted their ruin."

"Knowing the songs of our childhood, and with a voice strangely like my sister's they sought to drive me from this mine by playing ghosts."

"They forged my sister's hand and wrote me warnings, stamping them with a seal ring which I had given Helen Weldon long ago."

"Now you know who I am, Boss Bender, and what I have accomplished."

"The money of Lucky Pete I sent to her to whom he bade me deliver it, and I have done my work—all excepting seeing you hanged."

Horace Hale had spoken in a low, distinct tone throughout, and Bender said anxiously:

"Yer don't intend ter hang us, does yer?"

"I do."

"Come, you must go with me."

He tied the three together, locked his cabin, and mounting his horse, drove them before him down the mountain trail.

It was daylight when he reached the spot where he had left Lanky, and just then up

dashed Frank Powell and nearly two-score horsemen, among them Faro Fred and Colonel Roland.

In a few words Horace Hammond, as was his real name, told his story, and then, with the prisoners, they dashed on to the Echo Gap.

Knowing that the outlaws were expecting Bender and his men, whom they had left to guard the pass for the day, the pursued tied the boss and his two comrades to horses, put them in advance, and Doctor Powell, the Kid Glove Miner, Faro Fred, and one other of the party, rigged up to represent the dead four lying in the cabin.

Then they dashed into the Gap, and on to the outlaw camp.

But all was desolate, and not a human being was in sight.

In vain was the search for Black Bill, Blonde Bill and the outlaws, for they were nowhere to be found.

Knowing that Blonde Bill had his sister with him in the camp, Horace Hammond was most anxious to find her, for evil though she had been in the past, he wished to protect her from the enraged miners, should he discover her to be with her outlaw brother.

The camps were there, and every appearance of a hasty departure having been made from them; but not a sign of one of the fugitives could be seen, and the hunt for them was given up.

Then all eyes fell upon Boss Bender and his two comrades, and the Kid Glove Miner said calmly:

"Now must set in the grave of ignominy the last of the Seven Stars."

"Bender, you and your comrades are my game, and I sentence you to hang for your crimes."

"You have but ten minutes to live, and may the Heaven you have outraged have mercy upon your wicked souls!"

"Amen!" said Frank Powell, Colonel Roland, and Faro Fred, solemnly.

Pleadings were in vain, and the guilty wretches were seized and swung up to the nearest tree, thus ending the drama of the Kid Glove Miner's Revenge.

THE END.

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